

Thriving in balance with nature



**Shropshire
Hills**
National
Landscape



Shropshire Hills National Landscape: An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025-2030

Guiding sustainable future directions for the Shropshire Hills landscape

Final draft for approval, Dec 25

Our vision for the Shropshire Hills...

Thriving in balance with nature

Everyone can play their part
in looking after what makes
the area special

Climate is stabilised
through decarbonising, and
we are resilient to change

Nature is restored
and natural
processes
regenerated

People are healthy
and connected to
nature – in vibrant
communities and as
welcome visitors

Water is clean,
and its flows
and cycles
support our
lives, and all life



**Shropshire
Hills**
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Land is nurtured
so it can sustain us

Summary of proposed key Plan priorities

Under each Vision heading, these are headline summaries of the Plan's priorities, which are fleshed out in Policies, Recommendations and Aspirations within the Plan.

Nature is restored and natural processes regenerated

- Build the **nature recovery network** by restoring and creating more connected habitats for wildlife – woodlands, rivers and wetlands, meadows, scrub, hedges, road verges, etc.
- Avoid further harm and **manage existing good habitats**.
- **Integrate nature with farming** and land management.
- Increase **native tree and woodland cover**.
- Targeted action for particularly important **species**.
- Support and enable **natural processes**.
- Help people to **connect to nature**.

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

- **Face up to the challenge** – changing, preparing, adapting.
- Achieve **big reductions in greenhouse gas emissions** through technological, behavioural and structural changes in all sectors.
- Encourage **dialogue and collective action** on climate.
- Undertake more detailed work on **adaptation**.
- Maximise **storage and sequestration of carbon in land**, and apply nature-based solutions at scale.
- Appropriate deployment of **renewable energy**.
- Seek to ensure a **just transition** for all of society.

Land is nurtured so it can sustain us

- Forge a **new sustainable future for farming** - especially livestock farming in the uplands, balancing food production with nature.
- Transition to **more agro-ecological farming**.
- Understand and value our **exceptional geology**.
- **Look after soils**, especially through regenerative practices.
- Support the movement for a **fairer and healthier food system**.
- Ensure **appropriate forms of built development** on farms.

- Support **sustainable forestry**, balancing production with other benefits.
- Support **skills development** for land management.
- Develop the role of **farmer clusters and groups**.

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life

- **Re-naturalise our rivers and their catchments** - with less engineered stream and river channels.
- **Hold more water higher up for longer** to slow flood peaks and maintain flows in dry periods, including rewetting headwater land.
- **Reduce all forms of pollution** to achieve cleaner rivers.
- **Manage catchments in an integrated way** for multiple benefits.
- Improve **management and storage of water** as a resource.

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

- Support **meeting everybody's basic needs of wellbeing**.
- Take active steps to **address barriers faced by underserved communities** (including local people and visitors).
- **Involve and welcome a wider range of people** from all parts of society to enjoy the area.
- Encourage **active recreation for health and wellbeing**.
- Invest in improvements and maintenance of the **access network**.
- Manage localised **impacts and pressures from visitors**.
- Support **learning** related to all aspects of the landscape.
- Enable more opportunities for **volunteering and involvement**.

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special Place

- Build a **regenerative economy** that supports a healthy environment and meets the needs of all of society.
- **Reject developments which harm** or take from the environment.
- Support transitions to **sustainable tourism and transport**.
- Protect **tranquillity and dark skies**.
- Value and celebrate our varied **cultural heritage**.
- Develop **sense of place** at local levels and for the Shropshire Hills.
- Build strong **communities**, and support **local action**.
- Optimise links between the Shropshire Hills and **surrounding areas**.

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The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special **Place**

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Introduction

Among the gentle folds of the Shropshire Hills are farms, woods, rivers and meadows. Villages and fields retain ancient patterns while the remains of hillforts, mines and quarries tell of historical chapters now passed. A varied geology forms the bones of the land, whose mantle of nature and natural processes have been shaped over centuries by human activity – sometimes sympathetic, and sometimes less gentle. The whole created by these natural, cultural and aesthetic qualities is a landscape that is loved and cherished, but shows signs of pressure, and sits in a delicate balance.



This Plan for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape aims to set a future direction for the area. It is based on the legal purpose for which the area is designated – to ‘**conserve and enhance natural beauty**’, and on addressing the challenges we face, both here and more broadly:

- The damage to **climate and nature** threatens human wellbeing and the balance of life on earth – we need a new goal and framework of **meeting everyone’s needs within planetary boundaries**.
- **Finding a balance of land use** – where farming produces healthy food, sustaining the land and rural communities, and supporting nature recovery and other public benefits. This requires communication on differing viewpoints and building of trust and consensus.
- **Improving our water environment** – in terms of both water quality and management of water flows.
- We need to **de-carbonise and adapt rapidly** across all sectors through **behavioural change as well as technology**, embracing the huge opportunities for a new economy and better wellbeing.
- **Encouraging economic activity focused on meeting people’s needs in harmony with the environment**, with all sectors urgently cutting emissions and adapting to climate change, to build resilience.
- **Supporting more people to have closer connection with nature**, be more active for health, help to nurture their environment and be part of vibrant communities.
- **Upscaling positive action** to achieve these things, stopping actions which continue to cause harm and go in the wrong direction, and winning hearts and minds for a harmonious relationship with nature.

This Plan aims to inspire, inform, connect ideas, co-ordinate activity, communicate strategic direction and gather support.

It is a plan for the Shropshire Hills area and not for any one organisation. **Making the Plan happen is a shared responsibility and everyone can contribute.** Its success therefore depends on the collective will of people to agree on the challenges and support the Vision and actions to address these. Organisations, land managers, businesses, communities and individuals all play their part in looking after the Shropshire Hills. All of these are audiences for the Plan, but this document has to be definitive and thorough, so summary supporting material will be developed to help engage people more widely.

The landscape has never stayed the same. Layers of human history are steeped into the land. People who live and work here have adapted to many changes and the different challenges of different times. They have responded with their skills and resilience, up to the present day. This plan looks forwards and is not about going back in time, or indeed about keeping things exactly as they are. Efforts to conserve nature and to make farming and visitor use more sustainable have already made much progress.

But other influences are pushing in unfavourable directions, and the challenges and urgency have increased. For climate we are at a critical point in time. A global rebalance is needed between human activities and the natural world, so that current and future generations can thrive, and is very evident in our local issues. We need to add to the best actions from the past, and do more, including in new ways. Changes in land use and our economies to recover the climate and nature can and should be done in a way that revives our rural area socially, economically and culturally.

"In every corner of the world can be found landscapes that have been shaped by the interactions of people and nature over time. These landscapes have been created by traditional patterns of land use that have contributed to biodiversity and other natural values, have proven sustainable over centuries, and are living examples of cultural heritage. They are rich in natural and cultural values not in spite of but because of the presence of people. Protecting these landscapes requires a conservation approach that recognises natural as well as cultural values, sustains traditional connections to the land, and engages people in stewardship of the places where they live and work."

Brown, Mitchell & Beresford IUCN, 2005 The Protected Landscape Approach: linking nature, culture and community

A protected area is more an opportunity than a constraint. It should be a focus for collaboration and positive vision. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape (still formally designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty) has some legal protection, and the designation brings some funding to look after the landscape. But we have to be honest that current levels of protection and funding aren't adequate to meet the

challenges we face, nor the big goals which the government seeks from protected landscapes. The Plan has been developed by a broad Partnership set up for this purpose and supported by a small staff team. It represents local priorities as well as taking account of influences from outside the area, including global environmental change and national policies. The draft plan was open for public consultation from May to August 2025 and has been refined taking into account comments received. See [Appendix 8 for more about the Plan review process](#).

The Plan is a statutory document and the partners behind it want to maximise its influence, but the Plan does not seek to dictate or control. It adds no new regulation or restrictions. The Plan is the place where the legal purpose to 'conserve and enhance' which relevant authorities are now required to 'seek to further' is articulated in some detail. It seeks to set out how the relevant government environmental targets will be met locally. It provides guidance on a range of topics, signposting other documents where appropriate. It summarises statutory requirements, defines Policies and Recommendations on key topics to guide the actions of stakeholders and sets out Aspirations for actions by partners. This is a balance of ambition and realism.

While the Plan is now going forward for approval, we need to keep it alive during the five year period it covers, and we still welcome views on its content, and how you may be able to help to deliver it.



Foreword from the Minister

Protected Landscapes are our most iconic and inspiring places.

They were created from 1949, with post-war Britain recognising everyone has a right to access the countryside – from Northumberland’s dark skies to the South Downs’ Seven Sisters. 75 years on, the needs are greater than ever, with nature underpinning our health, economy and climate. That’s why this government will empower Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible.

Covering 25% of England, but half of our priority habitats, Protected Landscapes are essential to nature’s recovery. This government understands that we will not achieve our Environment Act targets or commitment to protect 30% of nature by 2030 without Protected Landscapes.

Recovering this natural capital is essential to ensure sustainable economic growth. Protected Landscapes are fundamental to strengthening the nation's economic health by looking after the natural resources we depend on. Through nature’s recovery, Protected Landscapes protect communities from flooding, fight climate change, enable sustainable food production and create green jobs. They also have a vital role in connecting diverse communities with nature - underpinning the nation’s mental and physical health and reducing the strain on our NHS.

This incredible potential is beginning to be set out in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. However, it will only become reality through the work of Protected Landscapes teams in collaboration with local communities, land managers, public bodies and other partners.

Protected Landscape Management Plans provide the focal point for all partners to agree a local ambition and a pathway to deliver it, shaping the future of our most special places, and therefore the country. It is vital that all partners work together to develop and implement Management Plans. To support this collaboration, we have issued guidance on the Protected Landscapes duty which requires relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

In recognising their importance to the nation, this government has committed to reinvigorating Protected Landscapes with new legislation, resources and tools. I look forward to developing this with you and other partners because it is only together that we can protect and enhance these re-markable places for generations to come.

Mary Creagh, CBE MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature)



Foreword from the Partnership Chair

Welcome to 'Thriving in Balance with Nature' - the new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan.

We have worked collaboratively with Partnership members, the National Landscape Team, local communities and the wider public to set out a vision for the future of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape thriving in balance with nature.

This is the first management plan produced following the renaming of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) to National Landscapes. This change followed recommendations from the Landscapes Review and seeks to improve inclusivity and engagement with local communities and visitors to the area; these are fundamental tenets of the Management Plan.

Our core themes of nature, climate, water, land, people and place are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent, and the Plan clearly identifies the importance of these linkages. No one theme stands above another and the summary of proposed priorities provides a consolidated overview of both opportunities and challenges across these six areas.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape is also increasingly exposed to complex external factors, notably - ongoing changes in national land use and agricultural policy, uncertainty in funding availability for protected landscapes and land managers, engaging with green finance, reform of the planning system and contributing to delivery of a range of national and international targets for nature recovery. Only through extensive partnership working will we be able to achieve and expand on the recommendations and aspirations identified in the Plan.

We have adopted the pioneering doughnut economics model to help understand where we are now and where we want to be. This approach recognises that global issues such as climate change, water management and food production are equally as important at the local level and highlights how action within the National Landscape is also important for positive national and international outcomes.

The Plan provides a broad framework to facilitate individuals, communities and organisations working together to develop and deliver innovative approaches; ensuring an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable future for the Shropshire Hills.

Alex Carson-Taylor
Chair, Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership

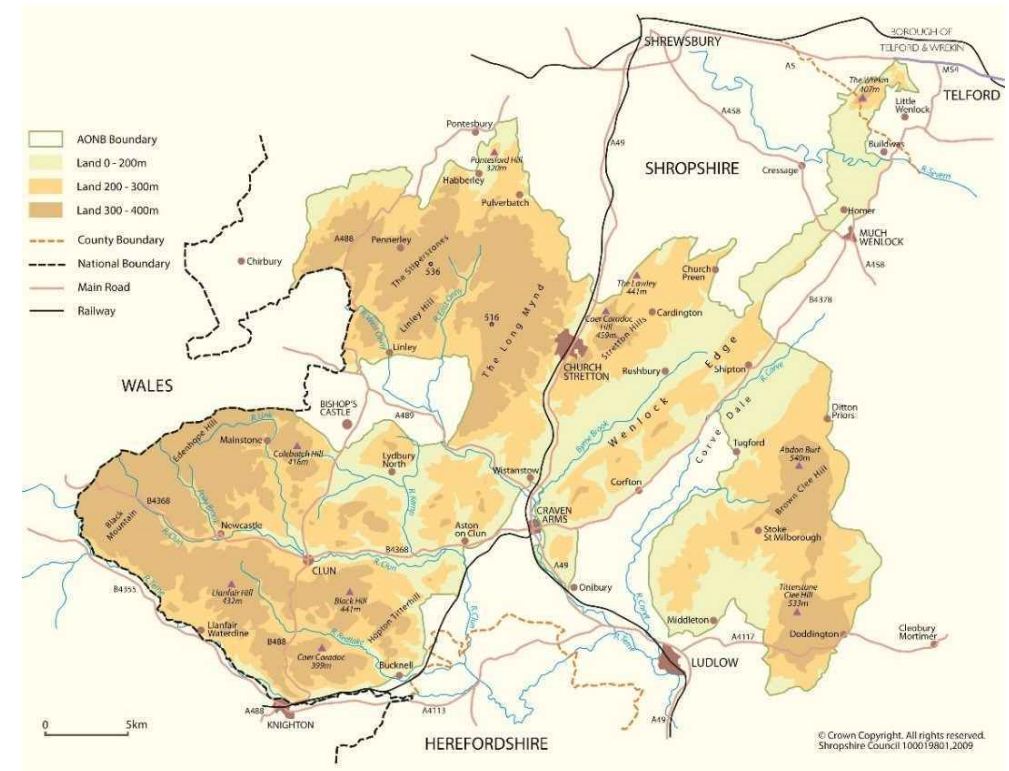


Background

About the Shropshire Hills

The Shropshire Hills are a beautiful rolling landscape lying along the Welsh border but only an hour from Birmingham. Best known for the Long Mynd, Stiperstones, The Wrekin and Wenlock Edge, the National Landscape also includes the Clee Hills and Clun Forest. With a diverse geology giving rise to craggy ridges, moorland plateaux and wooded scarps, the landscape of hills, farmland, woods, rivers and villages is rich in wildlife and heritage, along with scenic quality and views, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment.

The Shropshire Hills is one of 46 National Landscapes in the UK - living, working landscapes that are unique and irreplaceable national assets. Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of a National Landscape.



Key statistics (for details see [State of the Shropshire Hills report](#))

Size: 802km² = 80,200ha (covering 23% of Shropshire); designated 1958
2 unitary local authorities: Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council
Highest point: Abdon Burf, Brown Clee 540m (1,771 feet)
4,626 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest; 10,282ha priority habitats
Resident population: 19,900; average age 51
80% of area used for agriculture, of which 63% is permanent grass
887 registered farm holdings; 2,019 people employed in farming
232km river and several thousand km of brooks and streams
4,042km rights of way (2,520 miles); 9,289ha of open access land
175 scheduled monuments; 1,075 Listed Buildings
14% of land is wooded; 6,800km hedgerows
2022 net carbon emissions 227.3 ktCO₂e = 12.3 tCO₂e per capita

‘Story of Place’ for the Shropshire Hills

This set of roughly chronological notes is intended to stimulate thought and understanding on the historical context of the area, from both natural and human perspectives. It is not exhaustive but includes some of the more significant things that have shaped the area to be as it is now as a National Landscape, and which may influence its future.

Rocks from many different geological periods, back to the Precambrian.

Movement along fault lines create the SW-NE oriented topography.

Location just beyond the edge of the ice sheet in the last glacial maximum 27,000 years ago. Non-glaciated V-shaped valleys.

Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement - hillfort sites, barrows, stone circles, trade routes for axes. Early working of iron.

Edge of the Roman empire – Ancient Britons and Romans fought. Hillforts in the landscape and place names e.g. Caer Caradoc, Wrekin.

Wroxeter an important Roman military base and town. Watling Street Roman road. Roman mining activity.

Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, on the England-Wales border. Offa's Dyke mostly built in 8th Century.

Norman castles, Marcher Lords, hunting forests.

Cattle trading, drovers' routes across the hills.

Wool trade, local sheep breeds – Clun Forest, Shropshire.

Growth of towns and villages - settlement, road and field patterns largely fixed from medieval times.

Plague (Black Death) 1348, a factor in desertion of medieval villages.

Dissolution of monasteries and land transfer to Crown. Skirmishes with Wales. England-Wales border fixed in 1536. English Civil War 1642-53.

Enclosure of common land. Reduction in woodland cover.

Importance of water transport, especially on the River Severn.

Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution at Ironbridge - iron smelting used charcoal from woodlands. Later coke made from coal (Abraham Darby).

Important place for development of geological science - Murchison and others. Rocks from Silurian and Ordovician periods were named here.

Darwin was born and grew up in Shrewsbury, the formative years for his interest in natural history.

Mining of barytes and coal, quarrying of dhustone (basalt) & limestone.

Railways around 1850s. Growth of Craven Arms as a sheep market.

Growth in visitors to the Shropshire Hills - Church Stretton known as 'Little Switzerland'. Forest Glen at the Wrekin a popular destination.

Post-war farming policies and grants focussed on increased production.

Modernisation of beef and dairy farms with continental breeds of cattle.

Development of stratified sheep production system.

Shropshire Hills designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 1958.

Increase in road traffic, house building, telecommunications masts.

Long Mynd bought by National Trust 1965.

Creation of Telford new town, 1960s.

Growth of the poultry industry, especially from 1970s.

Robert Hart develops concept of 'Forest Gardening' near Wenlock Edge.

Some of first farm environment schemes 1980s. Clun Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), later also Shropshire Hills ESA.

Ironbridge became a World Heritage Site 1986.

Ludlow's growing reputation as a food destination.

Unitary Telford & Wrekin Council split from Shropshire 1998.

BSE (mad cow disease) 1980s – 90s. Foot and Mouth epidemic 2001.

Shropshire local authorities become unitary Shropshire Council 2009.

More conservation activity - projects, land acquisition for nature.

Increasing outdoor recreation. Shropshire Hills secures EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter.

LEADER rural development programmes. Lottery funded projects.

Improved provision of broadband and mobile phone service.

Closure of Ironbridge Power station 2015.

Polarisation over development e.g. large scale poultry units, housing.

Increasing focus on river catchments. Clun catchment nutrient issues.

More frequent flooding on River Severn and other rivers.

Widespread declaration of Climate and Ecological Emergency.

Covid-19 pandemic and recovery 2020-22.

National Landscape name. Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Interest in regenerative farming and formation of farmer groups.

Geographical context

Shropshire is England's largest inland county, and the Shropshire Hills forms part of headwaters of the Severn, the UK's longest river. The Shropshire Hills is one of the more sparsely populated areas of England, with a density of people 17 times less than the average for England.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape makes up most of the uplands of Shropshire, covering 23% of the county but holding only around 6% of its population. There is a big contrast between the relatively remote western parts of the Shropshire Hills along the Welsh border, and the eastern edges which lie close to Wolverhampton and the West Midlands conurbation. The closest other protected landscapes are the Malvern Hills about 12 miles to the south-east of Cleehill, and Cannock Chase about 20 miles to the east of the Wrekin. The Shropshire Hills is the largest National Landscape in the Midlands area, and some distance from the nearest National Parks (Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog). It is therefore very important as an accessible, high quality landscape for a wide catchment area including large urban populations.

Its position in the country means that the Shropshire Hills combine landscapes and wildlife characteristic of both upland and lowland, and northern and southern Britain, in an unusual blend.

The Shropshire Hills is not an absolute unit of area which works for every purpose, but it is a coherent whole as a National Landscape, encompassing almost all of the upland area of Shropshire and associated land of high ecological value. Neither is it a self-contained or isolated unit, but it connects to and interacts with its surrounding areas, and forms a nested part of wider units of different kinds, which extend in different directions, especially:

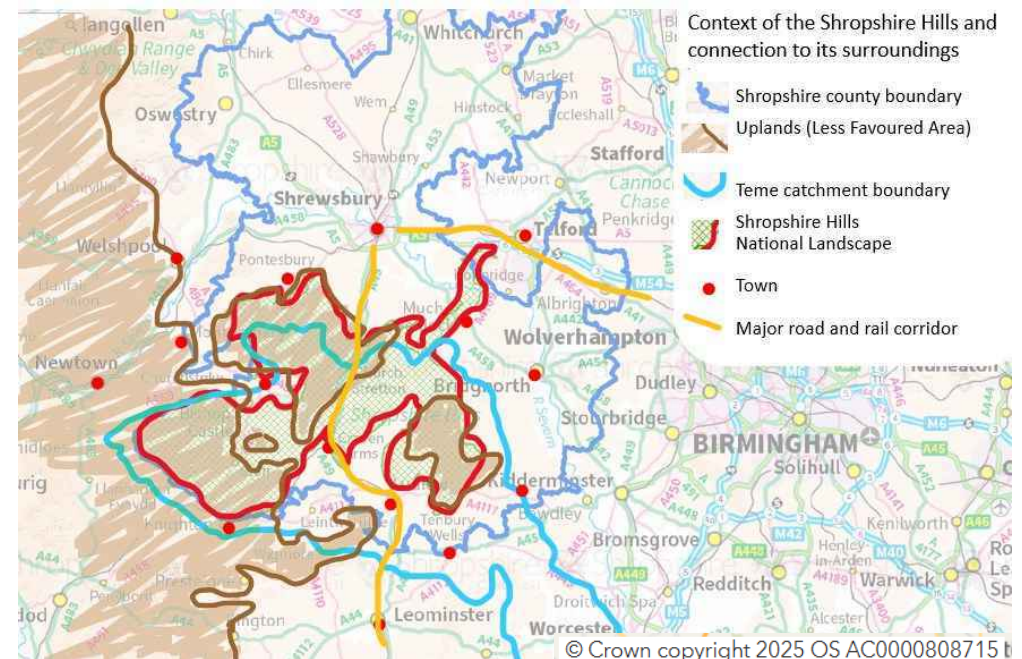
- The administrative unit of Shropshire – extending mainly to the north and east
- The River Teme catchment – extending to the south-east towards Worcester
- As an outlier of the uplands of mid Wales and the Marches – extending to the west

The Shropshire Hills is surrounded closely by a ring of modest sized towns – Craven Arms, Ludlow, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock,

Wellington, Pontesbury, Minsterley, Montgomery, Bishop's Castle and Knighton. And slightly further away by larger settlements – Shrewsbury, Telford, Bridgnorth, Newtown and Welshpool. The Shropshire Hills has links with all of these towns, economically and culturally.

The major road and rail corridors north-south along the A49 and east-west along the M54/A5 are significant connections for the area. Other linear features crossing in and out of the area include Offa's Dyke in the west, as well as brooks and streams flowing north into the mid Severn catchment from the northern part of the area.

While the population within the designated area is around 19,900, the population within the designated area plus a 5km radius of it is substantially higher, at 205,246.



All of these connections need to be taken into account when considering the Shropshire Hills as a place connected with its surroundings, and its future potential as a special landscape.

Summary on the legal basis and context, with links to appendices for more detail

Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework

A new framework of targets and outcomes for National Landscapes and National Parks was defined by government in 2024. These are targets for the areas and not for any particular organisation. They are a key focus of this Plan. The targets cover the topics of managing, restoring, and creating habitats; greenhouse gas emissions; nature friendly farming; peat, woodland and trees; accessibility and engagement; and heritage assets.

To read more on this see Targets & Outcomes Framework section.

The Landscapes Review

An independent review commissioned by government of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty reported in 2019. It made recommendations including to strengthen AONBs. The government have implemented some of these.

To read more on this see Appendix 1.

Rebranding as National Landscapes

AONBs were rebranded in November 2023 as National Landscapes. The legal designation remains as area of outstanding natural beauty.

To read more on this see Appendix 2.

Legal framework including strengthened duty on public bodies

The single statutory purpose of the designation is '*to conserve and enhance natural beauty*', unchanged since 1949. In 2000 the Management Plan became a statutory document. In 2023, the statutory duty on 'relevant authorities' from was strengthened from 'have regard' to the purpose of designation to 'seek to further' the purpose. This includes all public bodies and statutory undertakers.

To read more on this see Appendix 3.

30 by 30 and Environmental Improvement Plan targets

The UK government has signed up to an international commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030 (a target known as 30 by 30). Other key government environmental targets are set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan.

To read more on this see Appendix 4.

International context

National Landscapes are classified in the international system of protected areas as cultural landscapes (IUCN Category V) - where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a character that is valued.

To read more on this see Appendix 5.

Shropshire Hills National Landscape structures – the Team, the Trust, advisory oversight and partnership

There is no single 'organisation' responsible for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. Certain legal duties rest with the Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Shropshire Council employs a National Landscape staff team of currently 12 people, which convenes various partner groups. New National Landscape structures of an Advisory Committee, Forum and Key Delivery Partner group are being put in place from 2026 with the approval of this Plan.

The Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust charity also raises funds and gives small grants in support of the National Landscape purpose.

To read more on this see Appendix 6.

National Landscapes Association and wider networks

There are 46 National Landscapes in the UK, represented by a National Association which advocates, communicates and supports the network to be as effective as possible. The Shropshire Hills team is also active in international networks through the EUROPARC Federation.

To read more on this see Appendix 7.

The Management Plan review

The Plan review process

The review process has been led by the National Landscape Team and Partnership on behalf of the two local authorities, and began in 2023. The process has involved workshops with the Partnership, evidence gathering and a public questionnaire, topic group meetings and work with key partners. The review was delayed by a year to bring the timescale to 2025-30 in line with relevant government programmes. To read more on this see [Appendix 8](#).



Answers to “What one thing do you most value about the Shropshire Hills?” in our public survey during 2024

Supporting documents and processes:

Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment)

The Management Plan process has to be accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment to check for any policy conflicts and alternatives. We do this through a broader Sustainability Appraisal which also looks at potential conflicts with social and economic objectives.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Habitat Regulations Assessment involves looking at the Plan in relation to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within or nearby the National Landscape. The principal consideration here is the Stiperstones NNR/SAC, though the River Clun SAC lies just outside the boundary and is important also in the context of this plan. Some other sites further away are also considered.

To read more on these see Appendix 9.



Statement of Significance and Special Qualities

Different people have their own opinions on what is special about the Shropshire Hills, and no definition is absolute. The aim of this section is to capture what is distinctive and significant, to help determine how best to look after these qualities within the remit of the National Landscape and how the area can evolve positively. This requires describing aspects which are subjective, hard to define and often difficult adequately to put into words. Such qualities are nevertheless greatly valued by people and may be threatened, making it important to consider them in a structured way. The qualities identified relate to each other and overlap, and should not be looked at in isolation.

Diversity and Contrast

With a variety of geology unequalled in any area of comparable size in Britain, the Shropshire Hills have no single dominant feature or landform. The area's landscape character is one of variety and of transition – between the lowland plains of the English Midlands and the uplands of Wales, and between north and south of Britain. This is reflected in both ecology and human activity.

The key components of the Shropshire Hills landscape are the hills, farmed countryside, woodlands, rivers and river valleys.

Hills

The rocky Stiperstones, the dissected plateau of the Long Mynd, the craggy volcanic Stretton Hills and Wrekin, the harsh quarried landscape of the Clee Hills, the wooded scarp of Wenlock Edge, and the rolling enclosed hills of the Clun Forest all have their own distinctive character. The hills define the identity of the area and are the backbone of our landscape. They contain commons, heath, moorland and rough grasslands, and are home to a variety of upland birds including curlew, red grouse and merlin.



Farmed Countryside

The patchwork of fields bounded by hedges results from generations of farming. Pasture grazed by livestock is the largest land use, but arable cultivation is also significant, mainly on lower ground. Hedgerow and field trees, including many veteran trees, give the landscape a mature character. Remnants of valuable grassland and hay meadow habitats survive.



Woodlands

The area has higher than the national average cover of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Upland oakwoods are found mostly on steeper slopes and are important for birds, bryophytes and lichens, while mixed ash-elm-oak woods such as on the limestone of Wenlock Edge have a rich ground flora. There are also larger predominantly conifer plantations, many small farm woodlands, scattered valuable areas of wet woodland, parkland, wood pasture, and small, often remnant orchards.



Rivers and River Valleys

The Rivers Clun, Teme and Onny, along with many smaller rivers and streams, are in a national context relatively clean and natural in form, and of high importance. Many are lined with alder, and home to important species like the dipper, white-clawed crayfish and otter. The critically endangered freshwater pearl mussel is found in the River Clun just outside the National Landscape. Valleys vary from the steep-sided batches and dingles of the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, to larger expanses with some flood meadows, and the broad dales such as Corve Dale and Ape Dale which divide up the area. The Shropshire Hills makes

up the majority of the headwaters of the Teme catchment, and a short stretch of the River Severn within the National Landscape divides the Wrekin from Wenlock Edge. There are few large water bodies but many ponds, marshes and flushes.



Other special qualities are found in different ways across the whole area, including geology, wildlife, heritage, environmental and scenic quality, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment.

Geology

The Shropshire Hills have great geological variety, with bedrock dating from the Precambrian almost continuously through to the Permian, and the influence of different rock types and structures on the landscape are clearly visible. There is a widespread mantle of more recent Quaternary deposits and along with landforms on the lower ground, these reflect the complex geological history of the last Ice Age. The Shropshire Hills are important in the history of geological science – Murchison’s study of the Silurian (including the Wenlock limestone) and its fossils being notable. The Ercall quarry has a well-recognised example of the sudden transition from metamorphosed and barren rocks to sediments containing the earliest known hard-shelled fossils from the Cambrian period.



Wildlife

The valuable habitats of the Shropshire Hills, especially heathland, grassland, ffridd, woodland and rivers are linked to a long history of relatively sympathetic land management. The Shropshire Hills have an unusual mix of both upland and lowland wildlife, such as red grouse and dormouse. The National Landscape is very significant in the region for upland species such as snipe, whinchat, dipper, emperor moth, small pearl-bordered fritillary and grayling butterflies and holds some nationally threatened species such as curlew and wood white butterfly. It is also significant for species of western oakwoods such as pied flycatcher, wood warbler, redstart and tree pipit, and a stronghold for species formerly more widespread in England like skylark, black poplar and great-crested newt.



Marsh violet

Heritage

Many ancient features survive in a landscape which has seen less change than many parts of the country. Defences such as Offa’s Dyke, Iron Age hillforts such as at Caer Caradoc and Bury Ditches and medieval castles and fortified houses such as Clun and Stokesay, tell of centuries of turbulent Marches history. The Shropshire Hills has the greatest concentration of medieval castle earthworks anywhere in Britain. Much of the field and settlement pattern is very ancient with tiny lanes, villages and scattered hamlets and farms. There are also estates, parkland, planted settlements and abandoned medieval villages, along with areas of later, more regular Parliamentary enclosure.



Stone and timber-framed buildings in a variety of styles reflect the diversity of local materials available, and there is a rich variety of churches and churchyards. The Clee Hills and Stiperstones in particular have seen periods of thriving industry such as lead mining and stone quarrying, often with haphazard 'squatter' settlement.

Scenic and environmental quality

Panoramic views extend from, across and into the Shropshire Hills, which abounds in both wide open spaces and intimate corners. There are contrasts from

relatively wild hills and valleys to softer, settled landscapes, as well as between varying seasonal colours of heather, grass, bracken and broadleaved trees.



The high quality of the built environment of towns, villages and rural settlement complements and blends with the countryside. Clean air and water are accompanied by other valuable ecological functions including food and fibre growing, and control of water run-off.

Tranquillity

Off the beaten track and remote in the context of this part of England, the Shropshire Hills are a haven of tranquillity – peace and quiet, dark skies and unspoilt views. Relatively low levels of noise and development are coupled with modest visitor numbers to create an unspoilt quality that is greatly valued.



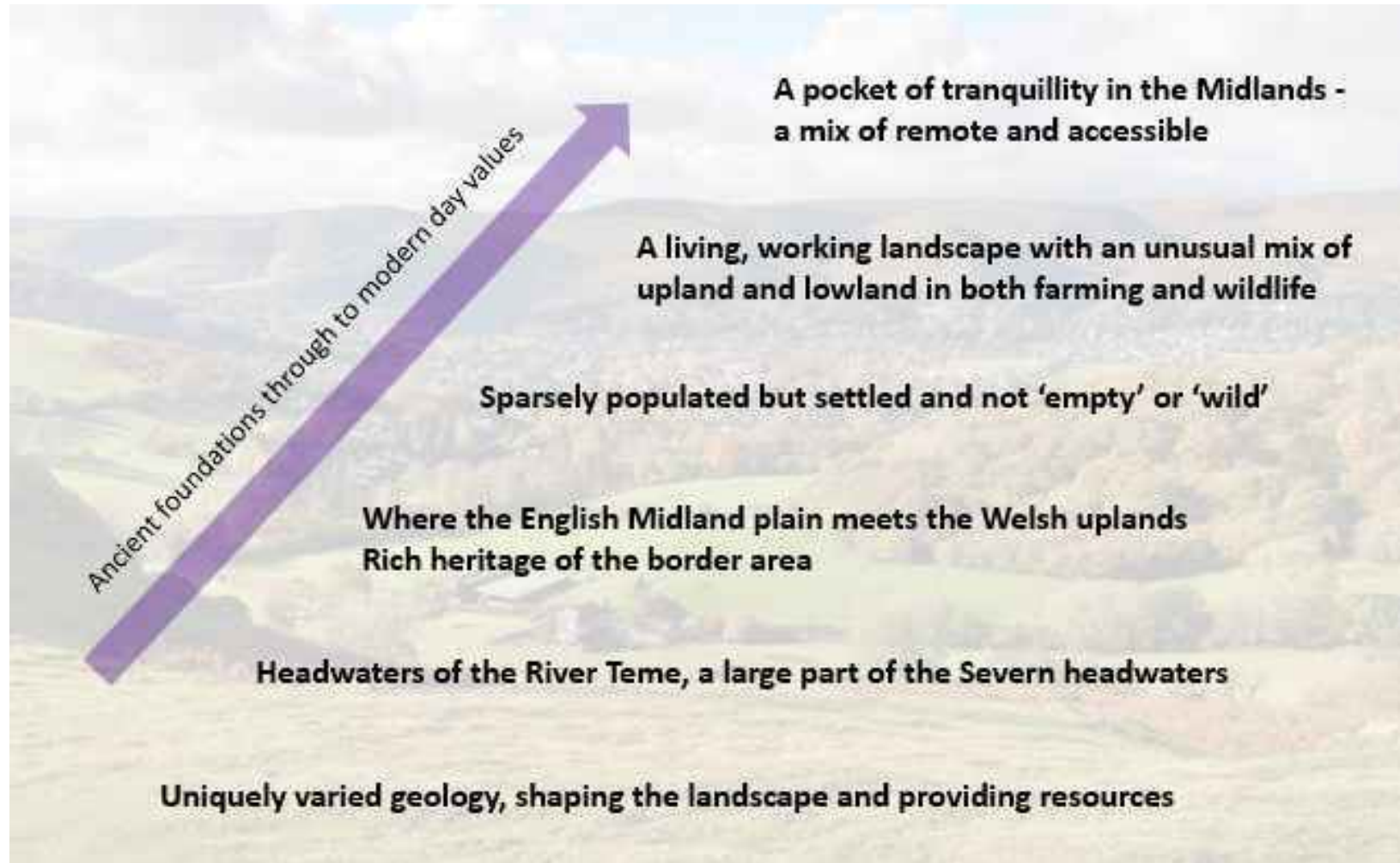
Culture and Opportunities for Enjoyment

The Shropshire Hills span a wide spectrum of cultural settings. These range from the urban fringes of Telford and Ironbridge, through the rural setting of market towns just outside the National Landscape such as Ludlow, Craven Arms and Much Wenlock, to some of the most sparsely populated areas in England along the Welsh border. Church Stretton has a unique location in the heart of the hills and a strong Edwardian character. The Shropshire Hills have been a cultural inspiration for writers such as A E Housman, Mary Webb and Malcolm Saville. Opportunities for enjoyment and wellbeing are open to both locals and visitors for walks and outdoor activities respecting the area's qualities. The National Landscape has some of the best rights of way networks in Shropshire, along with most of its open access land, plus a wide variety of sites, features and promoted routes.



Biocultural uniqueness of the Shropshire Hills

As an addition in this new Plan we have tried to define what is unique about the Shropshire Hills, resulting from the particular interaction of natural and human factors over time. These shape the future interaction and can guide our best actions.



Key issues identified and drivers of change

Building on work undertaken by the Partnership at the start of the review process the following issues and drivers of change have been identified to address in this plan:

- **Climate change mitigation and adaptation**, including integrating and developing content from the AONB Partnership's Climate Change Action Plan, and from local and national strategies and plans for Net Zero.
- **Need for nature recovery** – linking to the Colchester Declaration, the Shropshire Hills draft Nature Recovery Plan, the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and Biodiversity Net Gain. The evolving roles of small landowners, Town and Parish Councils and the aspirations of local communities in nature recovery.
- **Agriculture transition** – shift of subsidies to public money for public goods, and especially the implications for upland farmers. Implementation of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) and support for those forms of farming most compatible with the National Landscape. Developing farmer groups and clusters and supporting their collaboration. Making the best use of land use tools and mapping, research and studies.
- **Resolving conflicts over planning** – especially providing sufficient affordable housing to sustain communities. Solutions are still needed in the Clun catchment to resolve nutrient issues to allow some controlled housing development. Review of the Shropshire Local Plan and Telford & Wrekin Local Plan. Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and development of the National Land Use Framework. Raising awareness of the National Landscape with planning officers and committees, improving information and guidance for applicants, linking with Neighbourhood Plans.
- **Meeting government priorities** including the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and implementation of the Landscapes Review, and changes to duties and targets which result from this.
- Need for closer attention to **natural capital** assets and the **ecosystem services** they provide, along with emerging opportunities for **green finance**, and the limitations of carbon offsetting.
- **Pressures on the local authorities** – financial pressures and loss of capacity. Priorities in the Shropshire Plan. Government steer towards local authority amalgamation as part of devolution policy.
- **Need to broaden engagement** – The rebranding to National Landscapes and associated uplift in status and recognition. Communicating the value of the National Landscape more widely. Health and wellbeing, inclusion and participation. Engagement with young people, and following through from younger to teenage to post-school. Making the Plan accessible to a wide audience.
- **Achieving sustainable tourism** – Some concerns about dispersal affecting quieter areas, and pressure on areas of conservation importance. Ongoing high levels of car transport.
- **Risks to heritage assets** from climate change, along with underfunding in the public sector and loss of income affecting heritage charities due to the cost of living. Decline in heritage skills.



Highlights and challenges from the last Plan period 2019-2024

This section summarises selected highlights from the huge amount of activity by many people and organisations during the last five years. It is based on the three priority headings of the last Management Plan. Some short case studies are also included.

Land management supporting landscape and natural beauty

- The **Farming in Protected Landscapes programme** in the Shropshire Hills has supported over 180 projects over four years, distributing over £3 million in grants. The programme is now in a fifth year, and Defra are envisaging a long term role of land management advice for National Landscape teams.
- Habitat creation, farmer engagement and community activity through the **Stepping Stones project** led by the National Trust.
- **Our Upland Commons project** has achieved some good outcomes on Longmynd, Stiperstones and Clee Liberty commons, such as heritage and wildlife work, public engagement and support to commoners including securing a Higher Level Stewardship agreement for Clee Liberty.
- The **Ancient Woodlands project** has achieved practical restoration on a number of sites and given advice to more owners.
- Considerable progress with community and smallholder management of **meadows and verges**.



- **Tests & Trials** for Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- Increase in application of **Natural Flood Management** techniques.
- A number of important sites have been purchased by **Middle Marches Community Land Trust** – Cudwell Meadow, High Leasowes, part of Norbury Hill, Minsterley Meadows SSSI.
- Increase in knowledge on **Carbon in land and soil** through Cranfield University contract and extensive use of farm carbon toolkits.
- **Clun Unmuddying the Waters and Water Environment Grant projects** completed.
- **CPRE Hedgerows project** delivering new planting and engagement .
- **Development of farm clusters and farmer groups** – including Upper Onny Farmers Group, Clee View Farmers Group, Upper Teme and Apedale groups, and continuation of Upper Clun group (Land Life & Livelihoods).
- **Draft Shropshire Hills Nature Recovery Plan** published.
- **Opening the Ark project** on churchyards by Caring for God's Acre.
- **Offa's Dyke Conservation project**.



Delivery challenges:

- **Agricultural transition** and development of new ELM schemes not as far advanced as expected, significant concerns in farming community.
- **River Clun water quality and nutrient issues** remain fairly intractable despite a lot of effort and attention.
- **Low levels of new woodland and tree planting** (though very recently increased public sector activity).



Planning for a sustainable economy and communities

- The number of adverse major developments has reduced, including large housing developments and intensive poultry units.
- New specific National Landscape Local Plan policy drafted.
- Production of AONB Partnership Climate Action Plan, considerable activity by South Shropshire Climate Action and Zero Carbon Shropshire (now merged as Shropshire Climate Action).

Delivery Challenges:

- Impact of national reforms of planning and environmental legislation more in favour of development.
- The draft Shropshire Local Plan was withdrawn in July 2025 and the Council is starting to develop a new draft Local Plan with anticipated adoption in 2028. The number of houses Shropshire has been allocated by government to provide has been roughly doubled. A five year land supply of allocated sites is not currently in place, affecting decision making.
- Provision of adequate housing and rural services to meet local needs.
- Lack of resolution of water quality issues in River Clun preventing development, including of much needed local housing.
- Very limited capacity for input into planning casework by the National Landscape team and no new capacity to improve this.
- No progress by government on statutory consultee status for National Landscape bodies.
- No progress on new planning guidance related to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

People enjoying and caring about the landscape

- Partner liaison to support management of visitors in post Covid lockdown peaks and new visitor trends apparent.
- Successful three year Young Rangers project now continuing through core team capacity.



- Diversity and Inclusion study completed with many useful recommendations and good partner engagement.
- New Engagement Ranger post conducting outreach work with under-served communities.
- New Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy and renewal of EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
- Completion of 'Fix the Fort' repairs on Caer Caradoc hillfort.
- Continuation and consolidation of Shropshire Hills Shuttle bus.
- Shropshire Destination Management Plan completed and strong Shropshire Hills presence in 'Shropshire Welcomes' campaign.
- Local participation in Generation Green 2 national project, working with new audiences to help young people experience the area.
- 10 years of management of the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre under the social enterprise 'Grow Cook Learn', and gain of freehold.
- Creation of the Acton Scott Heritage Farm Trust and re-opening of the farm attraction.
- Growth of citizen science initiatives including wildlife monitoring, water quality and other aspects.
- Shropshire Love Nature Festivals and Shropshire Hills Hay Meadow Festivals.
- Continuation through the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust of the Conservation Fund, awarding grants to many community projects.
- Farm education visits completed through several programmes.
- Delivery of 'Access for All' Defra capital projects through partners.



Delivery Challenges

- Reduction in rights of way maintenance capacity and funding.
- Understanding of the National Landscape is still relatively low.
- Achieving better inclusion at scale is a real challenge.
- Diversity within National Landscape governance structures and workforce is low.

Overall highlights during period of 2019–2024 Plan

- **The Landscapes Review** of 2019 led by Julian Glover has resulted in changes which do amount to a step change for AONBs, even if not all the recommendations were implemented by government.
- **Rebranding** from AONBs to National Landscapes has helped to build recognition, engage new audiences, and strengthen the national family of these landscapes.
- **Strengthening of the legal duty** on public bodies, now to 'seek to further' the purpose of designation.

Delivery Challenges:

- The National Landscape team has had to pick up **new government initiatives at short notice**. Though the funding is welcome, the **timescales have made forward planning difficult**.
- Linked to the above, it has been especially difficult to **connect Management Plan actions to delivery** through this plan period.
- Capacity and connection to the National Landscape of some **key partner organisations** has been a challenge.
- The **geographical spread of delivery activity** around the Shropshire Hills is quite uneven, with generally more in the west.



New National Landscape logos – a coherent family identity

Selected case studies from 2019–2024 spanning multiple Plan priorities

(Other case studies are included in the Plan under specific headings)

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL)

In July 2021, Defra launched this grant programme for farmers and land managers in England's Protected Landscapes, to support one-off farming projects that provide benefits to climate, nature, people and place. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team was allocated £1.9 million over the first three years, a further £1.3million for an extension year 4 and £1.1 million for a fifth year 2025–26. The team recruited a full-time Adviser (later two full time posts) to support applicants, and an Administrator. Other members of the team also assisted with advising applicants and developing applications. A Grant Awards Panel was set up involving local farmers and land managers, alongside representatives of organisations with relevant interests and experience.

The Shropshire Hills outputs from 2021–24 included (among others):

- 151 projects approved, across 19,864 ha of land
- 228 farmers participating in the programme (including some in collaborative groups and clusters)
- £3,165,769 distributed in grants to farmers and land managers
- 1,114 ha of land managed with regenerative farming techniques
- 12,537m of hedgerow planted, and 15,386m hedgerow managed
- 13,952 trees planted.



Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust and the Conservation Fund

The Trust continues to support local people to take action to care for the countryside around them. Around £15,000 a year is distributed to projects through the Conservation Fund.

From 2022-25 the Conservation Fund supported 35 Projects. Total funding distributed: £47,067 - providing an average of 49% of the financing to successful projects. Organisations funded include 8 charities, 15 community groups, 2 schools, and 3 groups focusing on young people. Projects included wildlife habitat creation, improvement and maintenance by local communities and special interest groups, nature-focused learning and adventures for young people, river surveys, contributing to saving curlews, and monitoring pine marten activity across the county.



Distribution of Conservation Fund projects over the last four years

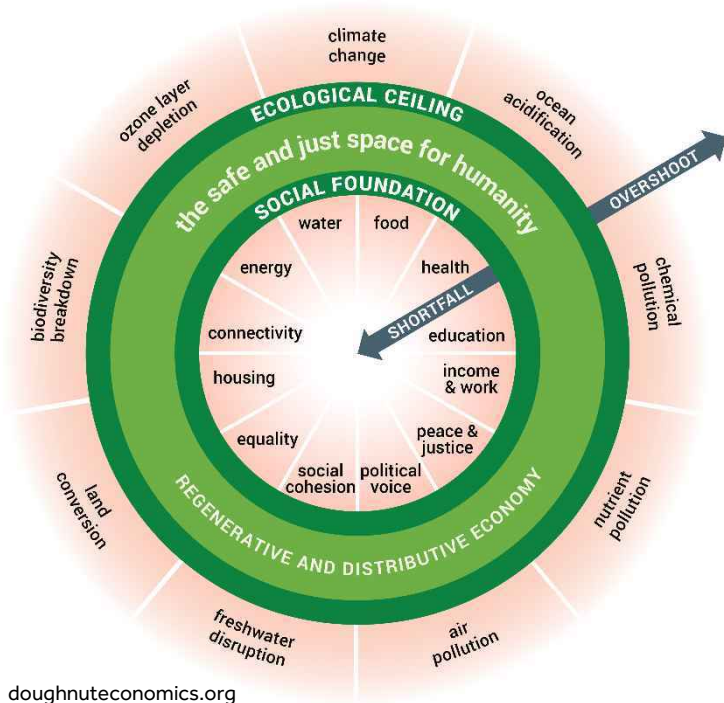
Stepping Stones – a partnership project led by the National Trust

The project area covers over 200km² within the Shropshire Hills, and includes two major sites of conservation importance: Long Mynd SSSI and the Stiperstones NNR. Stepping Stones takes an innovative, landscape-scale approach to nature conservation. The aim is ecological connectivity: connecting wildlife habitats by strengthening or creating 'stepping stones' and corridors of habitat between and around the two core sites of Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. In practice, this means creating areas of heathland, flower-rich grassland and broadleaved woodland and linking them by a network of hedgerows, road verges, hillsides and streamside wetlands. There have been three main strands to the programme: working with farmers, working with the wider local community and volunteers, and managing 'stepping stones' owned by the National Trust and partner organisations. The project has also been driving forward the implementation of 12 Species Action Plans for key local species.



The Doughnut Economics model as a framework

The Doughnut is a powerful visual model of how we can meet the needs of all people within the means of the living planet. It is gaining momentum as a tool for use at global and local levels and informs this Plan's Vision.

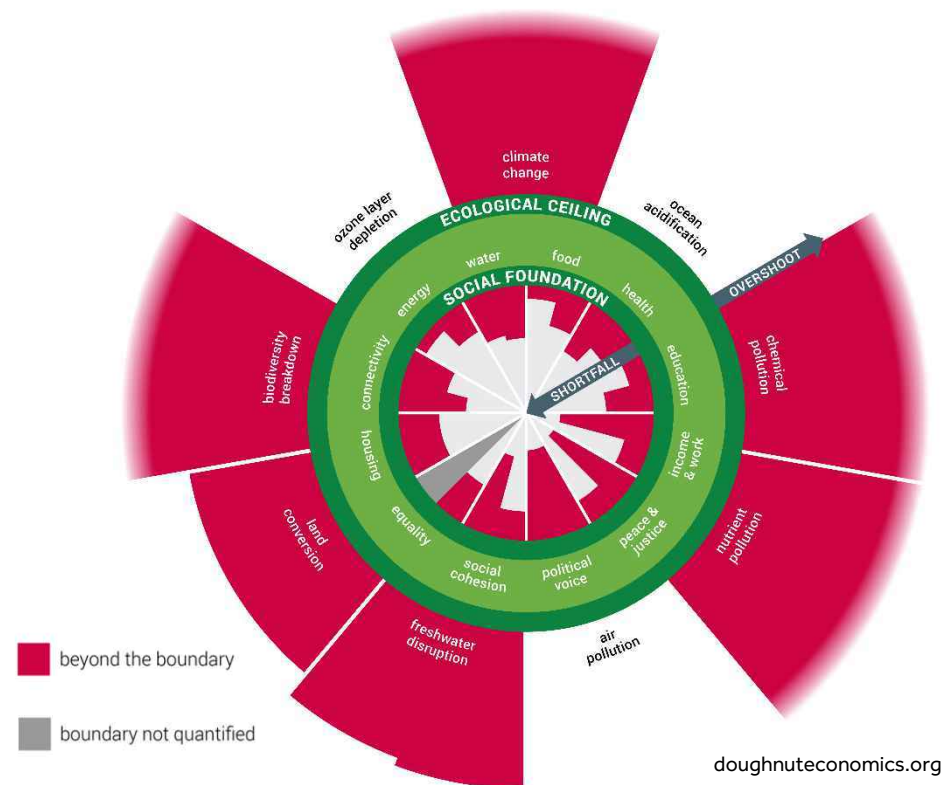


This image is the concept of the doughnut – the scale of humanity's use of resources radiates out from the centre. The 'social foundation' is about people having life's essentials, and the 'ecological ceiling' is the Earth's life-support systems.

Between these two sets of boundaries lies the doughnut-shaped space (in bright green) that is both ecologically safe and socially just - a space in which humanity can thrive.

The nine dimensions of the ecological ceiling are the planetary boundaries defined by Earth system scientists - processes which if disrupted risk the stability of the entire planet. The 12 dimensions of the social foundation are derived from the social priorities agreed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Doughnut model brings together these widely accepted measures and reminds us to see that our system is a complex interdependent whole. There is no single answer or single measure of progress - we need to see things 'in the round'.

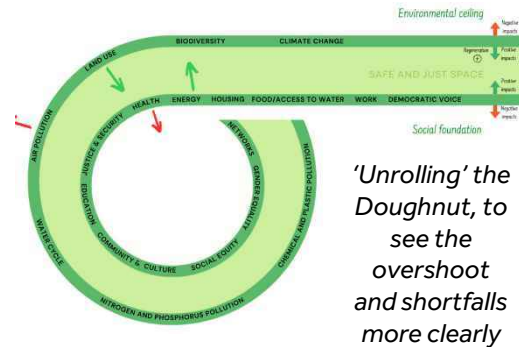
Using measurable indicators of the social and ecological dimensions, the image below shows a snapshot of where we are considered to be now globally (updated 2025, using 2022 data). The length of the red segments shows by how much people are falling short on life's essentials, and by how much we are overshooting the planetary boundaries.



This shows a world that is deeply out of balance - these are the 'red warning lights' on the earth's life support systems and on the opportunities for all people to have reasonable lives. The trends show some progress on bringing more people out of critical deprivation but a worsening of critical planetary degradation. To avoid the breakdown of life systems and further great suffering we need to make plans, strategies and decisions at all levels that help us to meet the needs of all people within planetary boundaries pursuing a narrow goal of economic growth at any cost. And to challenge and rethink plans and decisions which don't help us do that. For more on this see <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>.

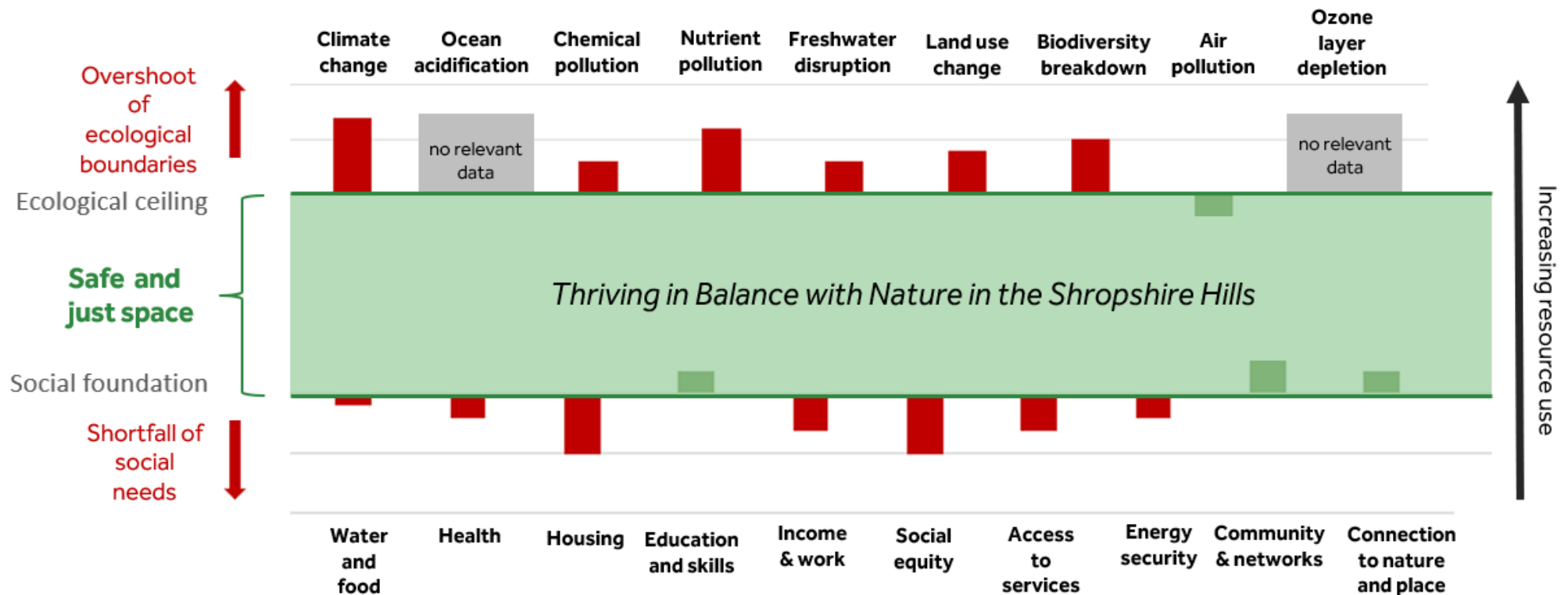
Summary of condition of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and trends

We have used the Doughnut as a framework to understand and discuss issues facing the Shropshire Hills, and the diagram below is our 'doughnut unrolled' data portrait summary to help visualise where the Shropshire Hills is now. This isn't an exact process but is intended to engage people in the idea of balancing a complex of multiple ecological and social factors, and in conversations about where we think we are and what constitutes 'progress'.



The size of the red bars indicates the approximate scale of problem or imbalance, and the green bars the scale of positive, forming a useful 'dashboard'. This is based on scores given from a rounded assessment of available data on each heading. The headings used in the data portrait are based on the standard doughnut model, and further explanation of what the headings mean is available in the full data portrait document. Less data is available specific to the Shropshire Hills for the social factors, so the confidence level for these scores is lower.

The **top ecological challenges** are **climate, nutrients and the healthy functioning of nature (integrity of the biosphere)**. The **top social challenges** are **housing, social equity, income and work, and access to services**. Projects and interventions should be aiming to shrink the red bars by reducing overshoot of ecological boundaries and shortfall of social needs. The desired state is to have no red bars at all – this is 'thriving in balance', within the safe and just space.



Data portrait for the Shropshire Hills based on the Doughnut 'unrolled'

Protected Landscape Targets & Outcomes Framework

The government in January 2024 published a new Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework “to support Protected Landscapes in meeting their huge potential for nature, climate, people and place”.

These ten targets will promote the actions that are most needed to achieve positive changes and will set the ambition for how Protected Landscapes can help to achieve three outcomes from the Environmental Improvement Plan:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife (targets 1-5)
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change (targets 6-8)
- Goal 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment (targets 9 & 10)

Natural England are now generating data against these annually (though the source data may not be updated so often). The available figures from releases to date are shown below and provide a baseline and some indication of trends (positive trends are highlighted with green shading, though the speed of change may still be inadequate to meet the target).

Targets	2024 level Shropshire Hills	2025 level Shropshire Hills
Target 1: Restore or create more than 250,000ha of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).	No data yet	No data yet
Target 2: Bring 80% of Sites of special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.	58.5% of SSSI features in favourable condition	59.3% of SSSI features in favourable condition
Target 3: For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having ‘actions on track’ to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.	14.4% of SSSI features have actions on track	16.1% of SSSI features have actions on track

Targets	2024 level Shropshire Hills	2025 level Shropshire Hills
Target 4: Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.	No data yet	No data yet
Target 5: Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.	No data yet	No data yet
Target 6: Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels. (Note that data used excludes consumption based emissions).	A 31.7% reduction in the total of measured greenhouse gas emissions linked to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape has been observed between 2005 and 2022 .	No data yet
Target 7: Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.	0 ha of peat committed for restoration	No change
Target 8: Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).	Total area 11,352 ha (=14% of land area)	No data yet
Target 9: Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.	No data yet	No data yet
Target 10: Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets ‘at risk’ in Protected Landscapes.	Listed Buildings 5.1% at risk Scheduled Monuments 7.4% at risk	No change

Condition and trends statistics by theme heading

(including key statistics from the State of the Shropshire Hills report)

Nature

- There is lots of conservation activity through protected sites and conservation organisations, and through agri-environment schemes (though coverage of these is reduced) and FiPL.
- Building a nature recovery network is however proving challenging, and achieving new habitat creation is difficult due the high value of most land for farming.
- Some quite intractable issues remain with condition of some SSSIs.
- Little information is available on condition of Local Wildlife Sites and priority habitats.
- There are some declines in biodiversity, especially outside designated conservation sites - e.g. key bird species, flowering plants and invertebrates, and also some mammals such as hedgehogs.
- Concerted work on certain priority bird species (e.g. curlew, lapwing) has helped to slow but not stabilise declines, and numbers of some species are still critically low.
- 36% of existing woodland is not in active management.
- There has been a recent increase in the levels of new woodland planting, in both the public and private sectors, and the type, scale and design of woodland planted remains crucial to whether this is environmentally beneficial overall.

Climate

- Greater focus on climate change has led to understanding that CO2 emissions from the area are higher per capita than the national average and are not declining rapidly enough to meet net zero targets.

- The land within the Shropshire Hills has however been shown to be an important carbon store, and this needs safeguarding in addition to looking for additional sequestration opportunities.
- There is an increase in net negative carbon flux for land (i.e. sequestration). Grassland is sequestering more now than 2012 to 2020.

Land

- 43% of farms are LFA livestock grazing. There has been a reduction in mixed holdings and an increase in arable.
- 41% of businesses in the area are in agriculture, forestry and fishing, forming the biggest category. Employment in farming has increased by 7% and accounts for 10% of the resident population.
- There has been an increase in agricultural holdings less than 5 ha, and a slight decline in 50-100ha farms. The total number of holdings is down from 917 in 2016 to 887 in 2021.
- Poultry numbers have doubled between 2010 and 2021 to 1.7 million.
- The transition to new farming support grants based on public money for public goods has not been as smooth as hoped and remains a big challenge. The recent freeze to the Sustainable Farming Incentive has knocked the confidence of farmers in the schemes.
- Uptake in the Shropshire Hills of agri-environment schemes overall appears to have declined significantly linked to these uncertainties, but the figures are not comparable to get an exact measure.
- There has been strong participation in the Shropshire Hills of Defra Tests & Trials for the Environmental Land Management scheme.
- There is also a rise in interest in regenerative farming practices and an increase in the number and development of active farmer clusters and groups.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has helped around a quarter of the area's farmers to be involved with projects, many trying out this new form of grant funding with support.

Water

- Of 232km of Water Framework Directive water bodies in the area, 0 km are of 'High' ecological status, 8.5km are 'Good', 188.1km are 'Moderate', and 35.4km are 'Poor'.
- The health of the water environment is of even more concern than five years ago, with a deterioration in the length of river length classified as of 'Good Ecological Status', and no sections of river SSSI in either 'favourable' or 'recovering' condition. This is despite considerable activity and investment, without which the situation would be worse, but indicating the deep-rooted nature of the issues.
- Siltation and raised nutrient levels in streams and rivers are a problem for some important species.
- The River Clun SAC remains in unfavourable condition for the freshwater pearl mussel population due to water quality issues.

People

- There are fewer young people, and the proportion of working age is down. 55-59 has become biggest age bracket. There is very low ethnic diversity.
- Health of the population is quite good and only a small proportion have bad or very bad health.
- Earnings are slightly below average. Housing affordability is slightly below the average for all National Landscapes, but above the average for rural England overall.
- There has been a 14% drop in registered employment.
- Working from home doubled 18% to 38% between 2011 and 2021, with travel to work falling correspondingly, though the Covid peak in home working has now passed.
- Recreational use of the countryside was subject to unprecedented peaks and new patterns in the post-Covid period. Patterns have stabilised but on a general trend of increase. This is good for public engagement, and for the most part has little negative impact, but

greater pressure is being felt on some key sites of conservation sensitivity, and further targeted effort is needed to manage this.

- The reductions in public sector spending are showing in visitor facilities, from rights of way maintenance to public toilets and visitor information.
- Tourism has not quite recovered to pre-Covid levels, and patterns of use are now different with a continued rise in small self-catering units of various kinds.

Place

- Development pressure on the Shropshire Hills has been somewhat lower over the last five years due to a slowing in house building and in new intensive poultry units. Recent national policy changes regarding housing targets and renewable energy are likely to increase pressure in the future.
- In the historic environment, the condition of scheduled monuments has improved with fewer classified as 'At Risk'.
- Lack of resources for maintaining heritage features is a concern, and some suffer from neglect for this reason, or through lack of skills or awareness of their value.
- Scheduled Monuments at risk have declined 111 to 59, 2012 to 2023.



Text summary of condition of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and trends

This summary combines insights from our Shropshire Hills Doughnut data portrait, available data from the Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework and the detailed 'State of the Shropshire Hills' report, a supporting document to this Plan.

The quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape continues to be high in a national context but is under a range of pressures. Despite a lot of activity and positive efforts, condition of some of the special qualities of the National Landscape is declining, and progress in addressing the most urgent issues is inadequate. Gains in some aspects are offset by declines in others, and the potential of the area to deliver even greater public benefits is hampered by these trends.

- **Nature** Good quality habitats are fragmented, and not all valuable sites are in good condition, with limited progress to improve these. Ecosystem functions (e.g. hydrology, soils, pollinators) are reduced.
- **Climate** Greenhouse gas emissions are higher than the national average, and only reducing at half the speed necessary to reach net zero by 2050. Carbon storage within land and soils in the area is very significant, but some of this is being lost as emissions.
- **Water** The quality of water has declined in some sub-catchments. Levels of some nutrients in water are higher than needed to maintain important ecological features.
- **Land** The proportion of land in agri-environment schemes has fallen. There is some increase in agro-ecological farming and in woodland.
- **People** The area is fairly prosperous on average but there are pockets of deprivation and some people face real challenges, often across intersecting issues, e.g. income, health, access to services and nature.
- **Place** – Development pressures and increasing road transport are gradually eroding quality of place and tranquillity. The condition of heritage assets has improved. Community activity remains strong.

Implications for this Plan of current condition and trends observed

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape has been designated now for 66 years. The objectives of the designation are being partially met, but are being undermined to an extent by insufficient resourcing and activity, as well as by harmful forms of activity and economic development, often supported by government or local government policy. Harm to the National Landscape's special qualities is done not just by activities which are unlawful, but by some things which are regarded as normal practice. Until this changes, the purpose of the designation and the potential of the area to deliver the optimum public benefits will not be fully met. At both national and local level there is a need to change the policy incentives that are just extracting value and causing harm to the National Landscape. This is in common with other protected landscapes in the UK. Until we succeed in preventing further harm we are running to barely keep still.

There is a lot of positive activity by many people and organisations but it is not enough. This reinforces the approaches of the Plan to seek to upscale activity. However, even this is not likely to be adequate, and we need also to go beyond just 'doing more good', to also win hearts and minds and to seek change at a system level. This means adopting a guiding principle of sustaining and regenerating life in the area - of humans and of all living things.



Our vision for the Shropshire Hills...

Thriving in balance with nature

The National Landscape delivers against national priorities and is relevant to current issues..

as one of a family of protected landscapes which contribute to a global goal of meeting everybody's needs within planetary boundaries

Partners locally work together to agreed common aims

Communities, businesses and individuals all play their part in looking after what makes the area special



Shropshire Hills
National Landscape

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to net zero in all areas - energy and buildings, transport, land use, etc

Nature-based solutions are deployed at scale

Adaptation is active for nature, infrastructure and the economy and society

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life

Streams and rivers are naturalised and healthy, from headwaters to flood plains

Water resources are managed carefully

Soils are healthy

Farming produces good food sustainably while supporting nature

Land is nurtured so it can sustain us

Trees and woodland are increased

Networks of wildlife-rich habitats have been restored and created

The best sites for nature are in good condition

Existing good habitats are managed well for nature and better connected

Nature is restored and natural processes regenerated

The working landscape supports livelihoods

Heritage assets are looked after

Cultural heritage is celebrated

The economy is regenerative and circular

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

People have sufficient income, housing and services

All parts of society can enjoy natural beauty

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special place

The position of theme headings is based on the concept that we need to live within ecological boundaries (outer circle), but we need also to meet people's needs (inner circle). The Plan develops this idea, drawing on the Doughnut Economics model (Raworth, 2017) and the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework.

Priority theme sections - introduction

The six headings are a way to organise concepts, and these topics overlap and inter-relate. They are not all equivalent topics one to another. Whenever we take apart the whole into these topics, we need both to keep in mind the links, and to put it all back together again.

The order does not imply priority, but it has a logical flow. One way to think of the headings is shown here:



Nature and Climate

The conditions for life we need,
and which are in danger



Land and Water

Where it all happens,
and what we need to nurture



People and Place

The bonds that connect us,
and motivate us to act



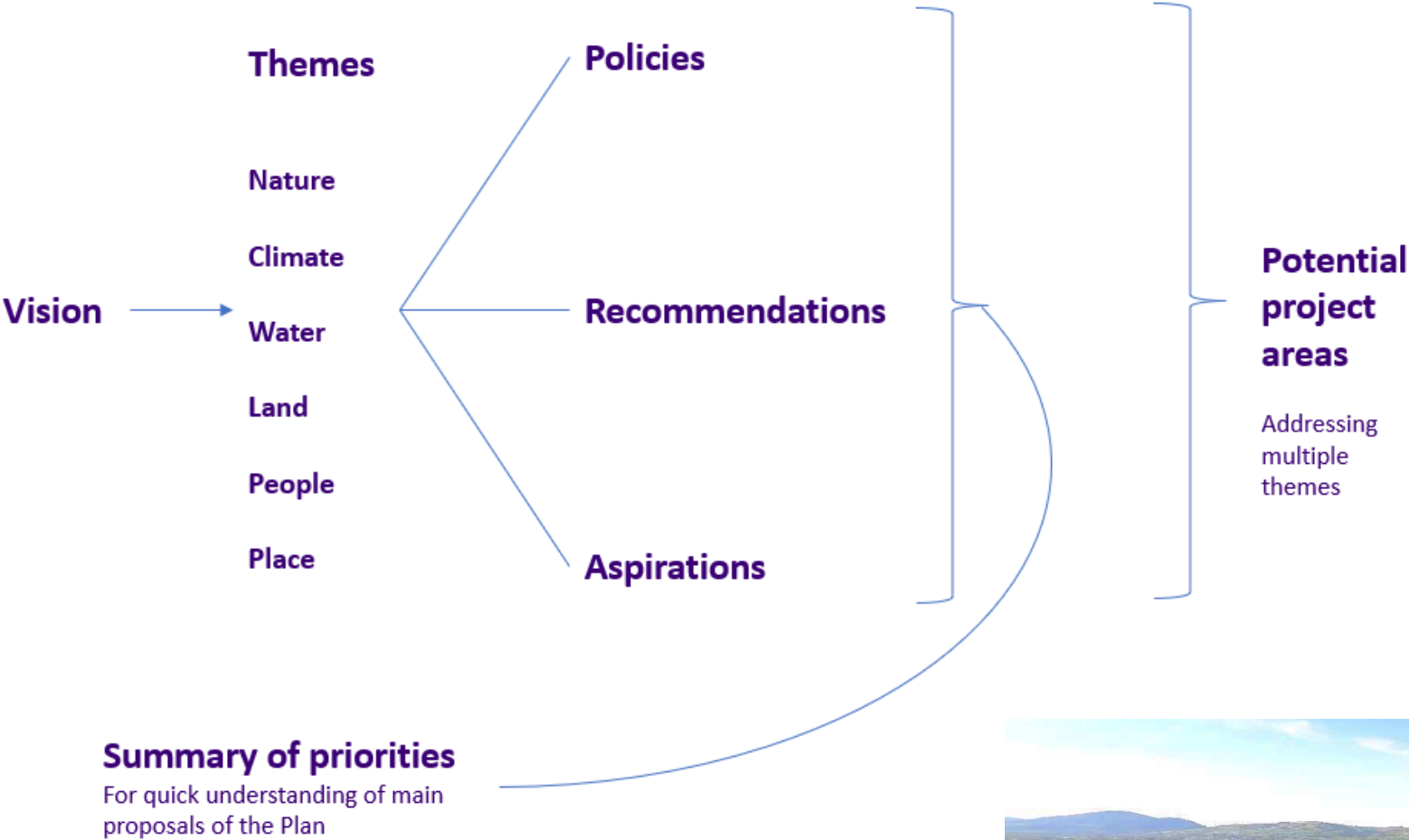
At the end of each section is a 'key link to other headings'. This reminds us that the headings are inter-connected and also provides an 'in between' place to put some topics which span theme headings and could otherwise be difficult to place. There are of course other inter-connections and links between themes as well.

Statutory requirements, Policies, Recommendations and Aspirations

Reflecting the role of the Plan as an influencing document, each topic section introduces a hierarchy of statements of what the Plan says should happen, starting with the strongest:

- **Summary of statutory requirements and duties** (with links) - these exist regardless of the Plan and are shown in summary as reminders.
- **Management Plan Policies** – are used where there is a particular need for clarity of position and to influence others. When approved they become policy of the relevant local authorities (as explicitly required by the CRow Act 2000). Plan Policies related to land use planning topics aim to add local detail and nuance to existing national and local planning policies but as a material consideration only, they do not have the same status as formal planning policies. In some cases, since the Plan is aspirational, Plan Policies may encourage decision makers to 'go further' than current extant planning policies, to benefit the National Landscape. While the Plan has statutory status, it cannot require anyone to do anything which is not already mandated by other means. The Plan Policies are however a firm steer, and relate to things that need to happen for the Plan's vision to be realised. Where Plan Policies relate to topics on which the local authorities do not have decision-making powers, they are put forward to guide the decisions of others.
- **Recommendations** – are more informal, flexible, and advisory. They aim to provide guidance based on knowledge or experience, to influence decisions and actions of any relevant person or organisation.
- **Aspirations** – are actions which are desirable but which aren't guaranteed to happen. A broad range of good ideas are generated by partners during the Plan review process. Not all of these can necessarily be implemented, but retaining motivational ambitions in the Plan should help these ideas develop and come to fruition.

Diagram of the flow through the Plan



Overall protection of the National Landscape

Planning and protection of the National Landscape

The planning system provides the principal protection for National Landscapes with regard to new development. Appropriate development for housing, employment etc is necessary for the economic and social wellbeing of those who work and live in the area, and a large majority of planning applications in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape are granted. However, National Landscapes enjoy the same levels of protection in government policy as National Parks, and some forms of development which may be appropriate elsewhere should be controlled within the National Landscape. Planning is not all about stopping things happening though, and national planning policy refers to both conserving and enhancing National Landscapes.

Responsibility for local planning policy and decisions affecting National Landscapes lies with the relevant local authority (in National Parks it lies with the National Park Authority). The statutory duties connected with this are summarised opposite. The National Landscapes Association have published Guidance for Local Authorities in applying the CRow Act section 85 duty to 'seek to further the purpose' in National Landscapes.

'Natural beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries. It includes landscape and scenic quality, natural heritage (species, habitats, geology and physical geography), wildness, tranquillity and dark skies, and cultural heritage (including cultural traditions and the historic and other built environment that makes the area unique). The historic environment is also fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of each National Landscape.

Other regulatory functions

A variety of public sector bodies have regulatory functions relevant to the National Landscape remit, including the Environment Agency, Natural England and local authorities. Used proportionately, these functions have an important role in supporting the purposes of the designation.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties – Overall protection of the National Landscape (not exhaustive)

Paragraphs 189 and 190 of the latest December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework set out the main policies – that “*great weight should be given to **conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty** ... (in these areas) which have **the highest status of protection** in relation to these issues.*” Further “*The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited...*” and “*the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations...*”. Footnote 7 to Policy 11, the presumption in favour of sustainable development, affords significant priority to National Landscapes as among “*areas or assets of particular importance*” providing “*a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area.*”

The National Landscape Management Plan, its Vision and Plan Policies are a ‘material consideration’ in the development of planning policy and in decision making in respect of planning applications affecting the National Landscape. This applies not only to the visual aspects of the National Landscape, but also to its natural beauty and all of its special qualities.

Decision makers who are public bodies must also fulfil their statutory duty to [seek to further the purpose of designation](#).



PLAN POLICY – CONSERVING & ENHANCING THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

1. Development

i) **The National Landscape should be considered in planning decisions for the full scope of natural beauty and all of its special qualities, and not only in relation to landscape and visual aspects.**

2. Regulating Organisations

i) **Organisations which regulate designated sites and features, protected habitats and species, environmental quality, access, and recreation should ensure such aspects of the landscape are protected, maintained, and managed to the highest standards as appropriate to the National Landscape designation. An informative and educational approach should to regulation where possible, but appropriate enforcement powers used where necessary.**



Plan Recommendations - Major development

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

Within National Landscapes the definition of major development is at the discretion of the decision maker. In some cases, thresholds lower than the normal NPPF definitions may be appropriate, and the Plan defines here some criteria to guide judgements of whether a development affecting the National Landscape is major:

1. Where development is more than local in its character and significance, and has the potential to have long-term impacts on the landscape, wildlife or cultural heritage of the National Landscape;
2. Where the scale and location of development (either within the National Landscape or in its setting) is likely to erode the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape and/or features of the area where the development is proposed;
3. Where the type of development is not directly compatible with its surroundings; and/or
4. Where the development would conflict with the economic and social needs of local communities and the guiding principle of Any proposal affecting the National Landscape deemed to be major development should be accompanied by a report identifying how the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape are fully respected, and integrated into the planning, design, implementation and management of the development. Any potential qualities of the National Landscape as a whole, as well as those specific to the development site). Any mitigation identified to moderate these impacts should be:
 - clearly detailed, in line with the duty further the purpose to conserve and enhance the National Landscape,
 - be compatible with the objectives of the Management Plan,
 - be capable of realisation through robust planning conditions or obligation.

Extracts from Vision:

Nature

is restored and natural processes regenerated

- Existing good habitats are managed well for nature and better connected
- The best sites for nature are in good condition
- Networks of wildlife-rich habitats have been restored and created
- Trees and woodland are increased

Subsections in this 'Nature' section of the Plan:

Nature recovery

Habitats – grasslands, heath and moorland, woodland and trees, ffridd and scrub, wetlands

Condition of existing sites, habitat creation and restoration

Species – mammals, birds, invertebrates, plants, fungi, micro-organisms

Natural processes, biosphere integrity

Ecosystem services, natural capital

Pests, diseases and biosecurity

Air quality

Biodiversity Net Gain

*Key link to other Plan themes - **Nature connection for people***

*"On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
The gale, it plies the saplings double,
And thick on Severn snow the leaves."*

A E Housman



Nature recovery

The legal purpose of a National Landscape to 'conserve' has always been accompanied by 'enhance', and so is not entirely static. But the decline in nature is reaching critical levels which worldwide threaten humans' survival as well as quality of life. 'Conserving' is no longer enough – we need actively to help nature recover. Natural systems have remarkable capacity to recover, if we can prevent further harm and allow and nurture the right conditions, but there are also positive things we can do to help.

Current government targets are set out in the Environment Act and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023: *"The Nature Recovery Network is central to the government's 'apex goal' of improving nature, taking us from protection to active restoration of the natural world. By creating more wildlife-rich places that are bigger, better and joined-up.."*

Key government **Environmental Improvement Plan targets** include:

- protect and manage 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030
- halt species decline by 2030
- increase species abundance
- restore or create wildlife-rich habitat

Progress nationally is not good however:

"many of the key actions and policies required remain at the early stages of design and implementation. Policy and delivery gaps remain. As things stand, the prospects of meeting key targets and commitments are largely off track."

Office for Environmental Protection, Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2022/2023

The **Lawton principles** of 2010 set out what needs to be done:

- Improve the **quality** of current sites by better habitat management
- Increase the **size** of current wildlife sites
- Enhance connections** between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'
- Create new sites**
- Reduce the pressures** on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a statutory process at the county level and being prepared at the same time as this Plan. The Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been prepared at the same time as this Plan and is due to be adopted in 2026. Principles set out in the Shropshire Hills draft Nature Recovery Plan of 2021 have been incorporated into the LNRS, and so the structure of the LNRS is used here. Relevant LNRS current draft Priorities (in bold) and Actions (bulleted) are shown below (note that these may evolve further):

Enhance nature alongside food production

- Establish Farmer Groups
- Enhance soil health and nature on arable land
- Enhance soil health and nature on pastures
- Create, restore and manage nature-rich farmland mosaics



Restore, enhance, expand and appropriately manage the hedgerow network

- Restore and manage the existing hedgerow network
- Create more connectivity in the landscape by establishing new hedgerows

Re-naturalise rivers and stabilise flows

- Improve water quality
- Reduce both flood risk and low flows
- Remove physical barriers
- Restore streams and rivers to a more natural state
- Create, enhance and appropriately manage riparian buffers



Restore peatland and wetland mosaics

- Restore existing areas of high-quality peat, fen and bog habitat
- Restore, connect and expand areas of wetland mosaic habitat

- Restore ability of catchment headwaters to act as a sponge
- Target regularly flooded land for wetland creation and grazing marsh

Create, restore and manage ponds, glacial pools and meres

- Enhance existing ponds, pools and meres
- Create new ponds



Safeguard and enhance veteran trees

- Identify, appropriately manage and safeguard the future of veteran trees
- Secure continuity of veteran trees in the landscape

Restore and expand nature-rich woodlands

- Restore and expand nature rich ancient semi-natural woodland and long-established broadleaf woodland
- Improve condition of deciduous, mixed and wet woodlands
- Restore plantation on ancient woodland sites
- Create new woodlands



Restore and expand nature-rich woody habitats

- Restore and expand wood pasture
- Restore parkland
- Plant and manage mosaics of scrub
- Establish new, and safeguard traditional, orchards
- Plant more trees in the farmed landscape

Restore, connect and expand species-rich grasslands across the county

- Set up infrastructure to support grassland restoration and creation
- Safeguard and enhance traditional hay meadows and other existing species-rich grasslands
- Create and restore species-rich grassland
- Restore grassland on roadside verges and alongside paths and tracks



Restore, connect and expand heathland sites

- Establish effective management regimes for heathland sites
- Restore heathland where geology allows to increase habitat connectivity



Increase the area of upland fringe habitat

- Enhance areas of upland fringe habitat
- Create new areas of upland fringe habitat to benefit a wide range of species

Enhance the wildlife value of open mosaic habitats

- Create, enhance and appropriately manage close mosaics of open habitats on former coalmining and post-industrial sites
- Enhance open mosaic habitats on brownfield sites
- Retain the wildlife value of scree

Bring nature into towns, villages and amenity spaces

- Integrate nature recovery within new developments
- Create wildlife-friendly gardens at homes and businesses
- Enhance wildlife value of multifunctional green space
- Effective water management in the built environment
- Reduce the adverse impact of light pollution on wildlife
- Increase canopy cover in the built environment

Reduce invasive non-native species across whole catchments

- Prevent the spread of invasive non-native species
- Implement a targeted programme to reduce invasive non-native species



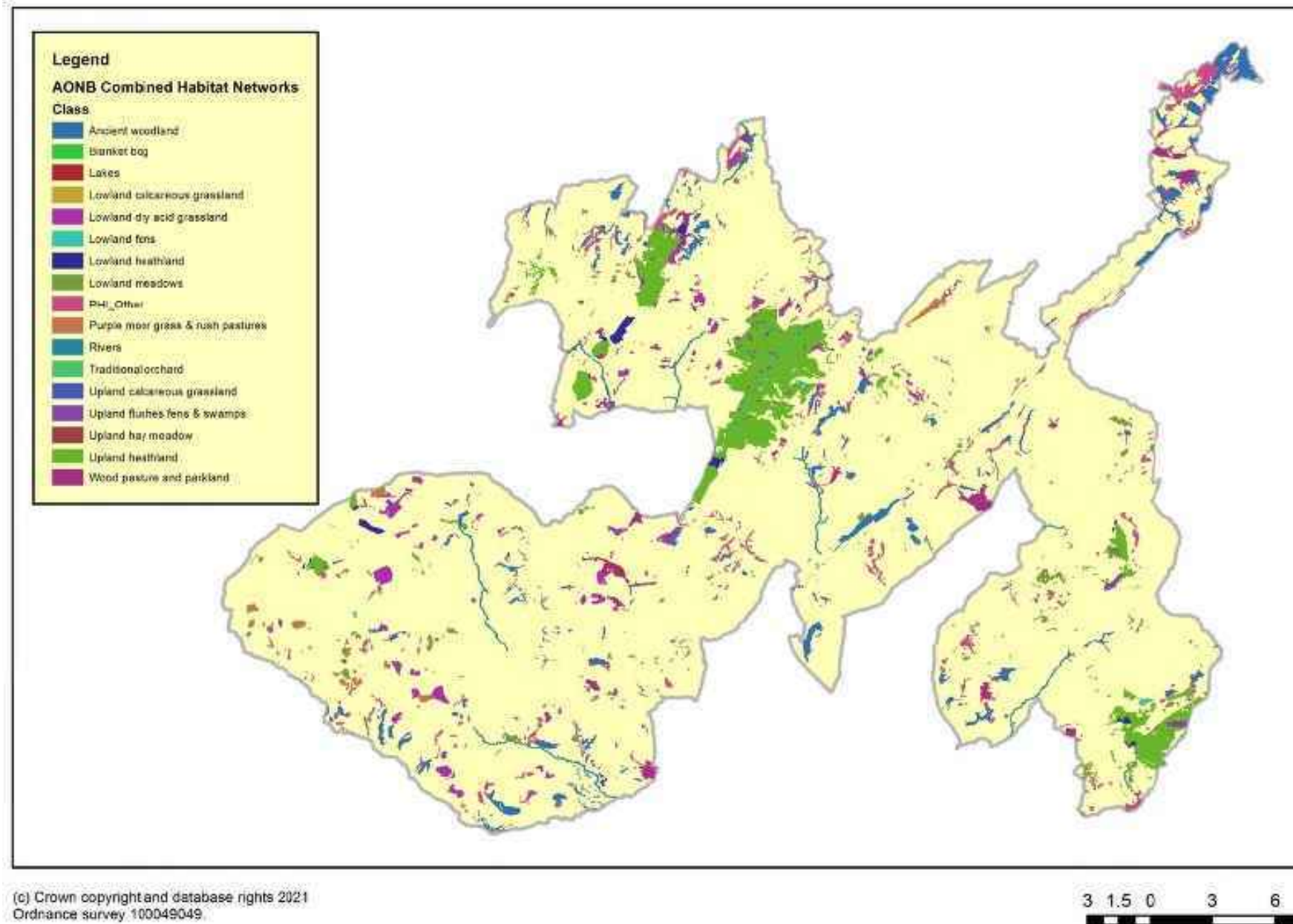
Enable more access to and connection with nature for health and wellbeing

- Enable access to nature-rich sites
- Create a more comprehensive network to enable active travel
- Enhance peoples' connection with nature

Priority habitats in the Shropshire Hills now

Everywhere is habitat of some kind, but these are the good quality 'semi-natural' habitats identified as threatened and requiring conservation action.

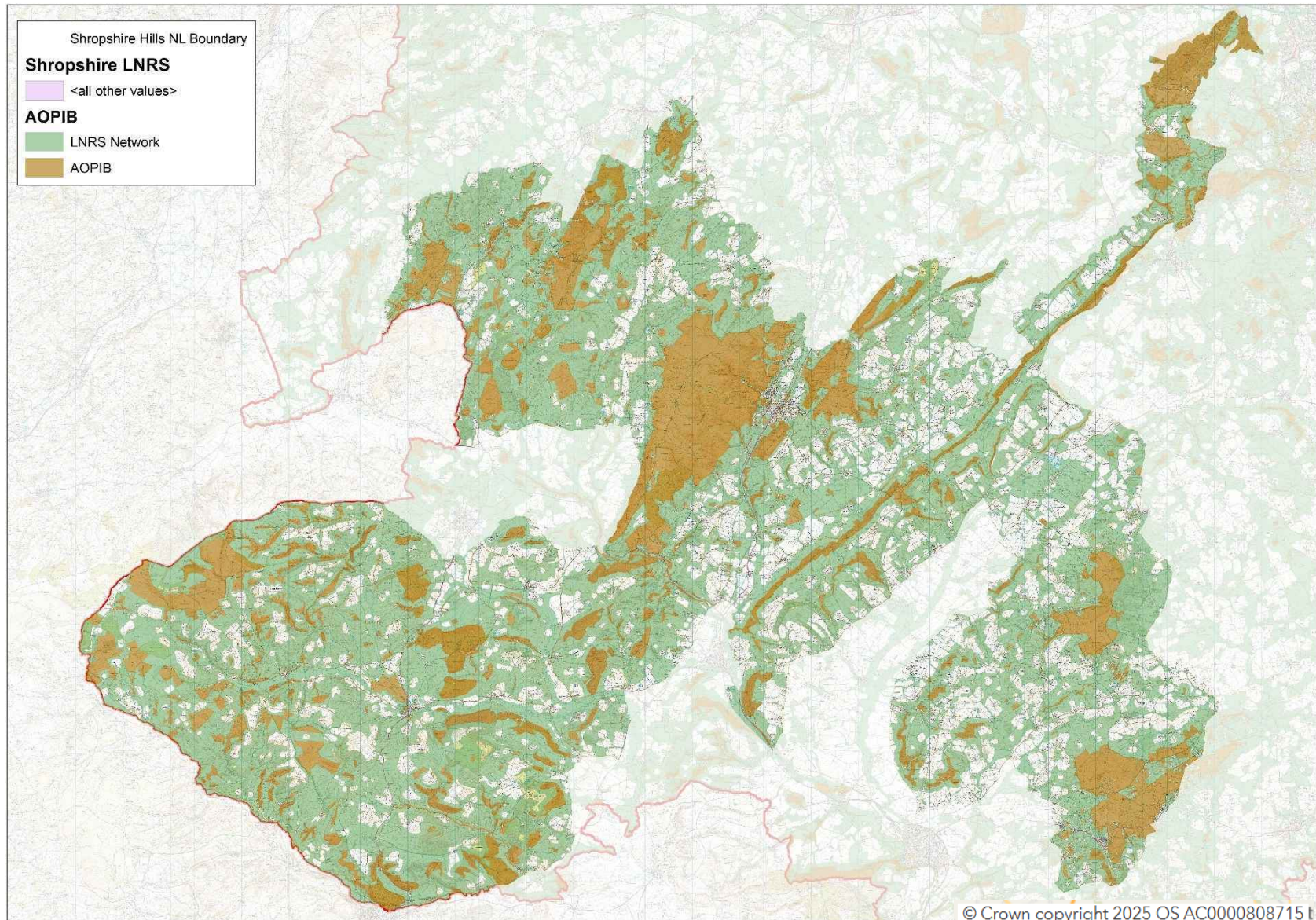
They cover around 13% of the area. It is clear that these are highly fragmented, and the nature recovery network is about expanding and connecting good quality habitats through restoration and creation.



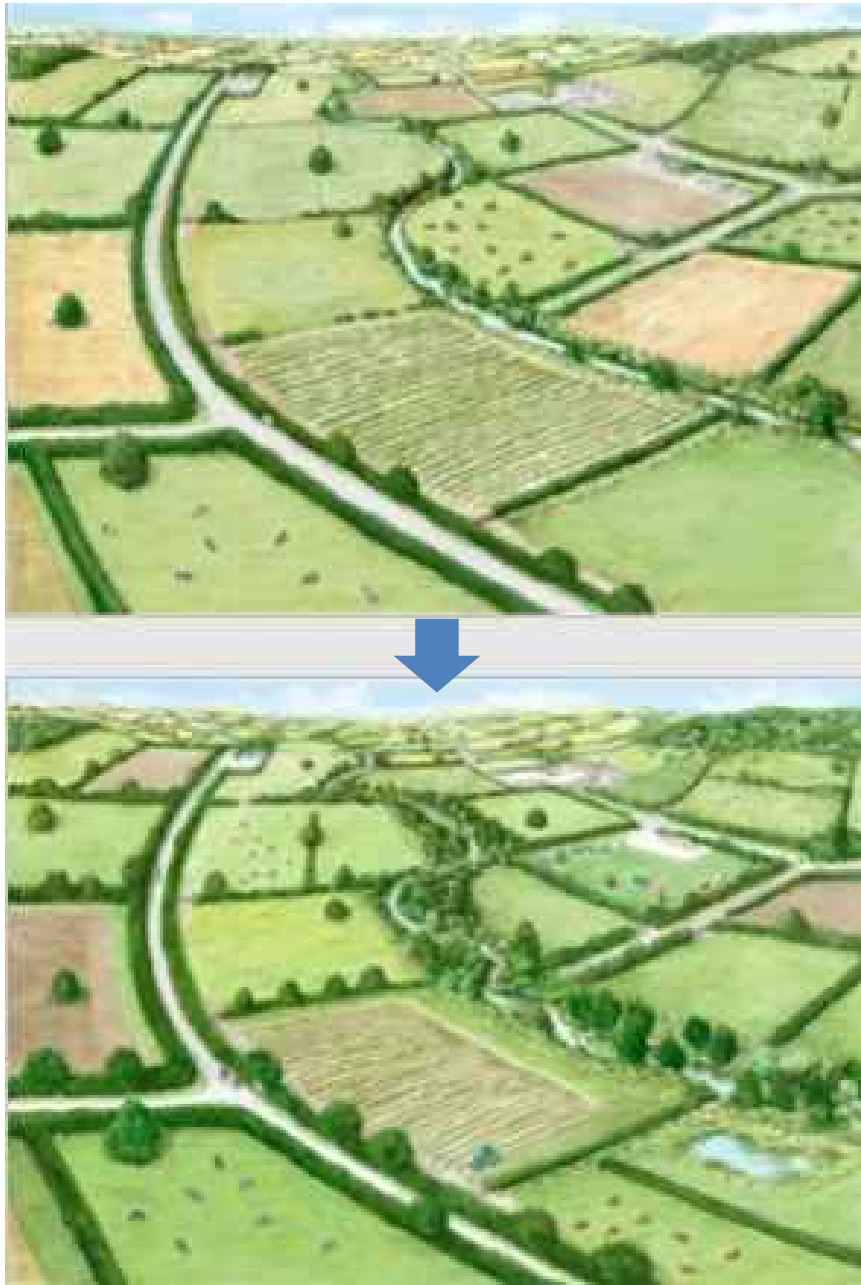
Shropshire Nature Recovery Network

from draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy
(pre-publication draft)

The green areas show where the best places to create or restore new habitat will be (and not that all green areas need to change).



What might this look like? In the lowlands:



In the uplands:



These drawings are intended to be broadly illustrative of the kinds of changes which would help to deliver nature recovery

Condition of existing sites

Condition of SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest)

This is now measured by each SSSI 'feature' rather than by area compartment, so the newer data is not directly comparable with older data. The previous trend was of gradual improvement.

There are 48 designated SSSIs covering a total of 4,626ha in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, making up 5.7% of its area.

The Targets & Outcomes Framework sets a target to bring 80% of SSSI features within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 (Target 2). Currently 59.3% of the SSSI features in the Shropshire Hills are in a favourable condition. This may rise once the status of the features not currently recorded is known. This is above the National Landscapes average of 42.3%, and the England level of 40.5%.

The Targets & Outcomes Framework Target 3 is by 2028 for 60% of SSSI features within Protected Landscapes to have 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition. The Shropshire Hills current level for this target is 16.1% (19 out of 118 features). This is behind the National Landscapes average 20.7%, and all England 20.9%, indicating some of the remaining issues are quite intractable.

Local Wildlife Sites are an important second tier of nature conservation sites, but these do not have much protection and there is unfortunately little professional capacity available to advise owners of these how best to manage them. There are 214 of these non-statutory sites in the National Landscape, making up 6% of its area. Detailed data on their condition in the Shropshire Hills is not available.



Case study - Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Landscape NNRs are an initiative of Natural England, expanding existing NNRs by adding new land where partners share similar objectives. The Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve (NNR) was declared in August 2025. Covering 1,562 ha, it has absorbed the existing NNR designated in 1982, and added more than 300% of additional land. The result is an expansive area along the spine of the Stiperstones ridge, representing a step change in the scale, biodiversity and community value of the reserve. The new NNR includes land owned by Natural England, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Linley Estate, Forestry England, Middle Marches Community Land Trust and Shropshire Council. As well as the previous NNR, the new reserve includes 5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 1 Special Area of Conservation (SAC)).

The land has important habitats including heathland, upland oak woodland, acid grassland, hay meadow, mire and swamp which provide home for species such as red grouse, curlew, small pearl-bordered fritillary, pied flycatcher, dormouse and the bilberry bumblebee. The new NNR will help consistency and collaboration between partners on objectives such as conservation grazing, bracken control, recreation management and headwater management, and will enable sharing of resources and expertise. This next generation of partnership NNRs aim to tackle the climate, nature and wellbeing crises at a landscape-level, as well as helping create wonderful places for visitors and residents.



Habitat creation and restoration

Target 1 in the Targets & Outcomes Framework is to restore or create nationally 250,000ha of wildlife-rich habitats by 2042. The basic apportionment for the Shropshire Hills by area of all National Landscapes is 6,383.6ha by 2042, or 319.2ha/year. This would be very difficult since most of the potential land is currently farmland. A challenging but potentially feasible target for the Shropshire Hills is proposed as follows:

Potential habitats for creation/restoration	20 years (ha)	5 years (ha)
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	480	120
Mixed woodland (minimum 70% native broadleaves)	480	120
Upland oakwood	90	22.5
Wood pasture and parkland	90	22.5
Ancient woodland restoration	200	50
Arable field margins	18	4.5
Scrub - blackthorn, gorse, hawthorn, etc	16	4
Upland heathland	18	4.5
Hedgerows	14.4	3.6
Lowland meadows	14.4	3.6
Purple moor grass and rush pasture	10.8	2.7
Wet woodland	10	2.5
Neutral grassland	14.4	3.6
Traditional orchards	6	1.5
Mesotrophic lakes	4	1
Acid grassland	3.6	0.9
Blanket bog restoration	10	2.5
Wet heathland restoration	20	5
Rivers and streams	4	1
Floodplain wetland mosaic	2	0.5
Lowland calcareous grassland	2.4	0.6
Upland hay meadows	2.4	0.6
Upland flushes, fen and swamp	1.2	0.3
Ponds	1.5	0.38
Line of trees	4	1
Inland rock and scree	0.8	0.2
Totals (in hectares)	1,517.9	379

Woodland creation

Target 8 in the Targets & Outcomes Framework is also set nationally “to increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from a 2022 baseline)”. A basic apportionment of this target by area of all National Landscapes arrives at a figure for the Shropshire Hills of 2,424.7ha by 2050, equivalent to 86.6 ha per year. A more detailed consideration of potential and recent experience of tree and woodland planting in the Shropshire Hills has been carried out for the Plan preparation. Based on this, a **target for woodland creation in the Shropshire Hills of 58ha per year is suggested (= 1,680ha 2022 - 2050).**

The total of the estimated target figures for categories of woodland classed as ‘wildlife-rich habitat’ in the Target 1 breakdown above is 41ha/year. Woodland creation will count for Target 8 as well as Target 1. Target 8 also includes other woodland, e.g. mixed woodland of less than 70% broadleaves, and conifer woodland. There is less congruence of these woodland types to the aims of the Management Plan, so a lower amount is allowed for of these in the local target proposed.

With woodland creation a numerical target is insufficient since the way it is done makes a big difference to the potential environmental benefits or indeed disbenefits if done in the wrong ways. Further guidance is set out in the Policies and Recommendations in this Plan and in woodland creation guidance. It is notable that the target includes tree canopy i.e. trees outside woods.



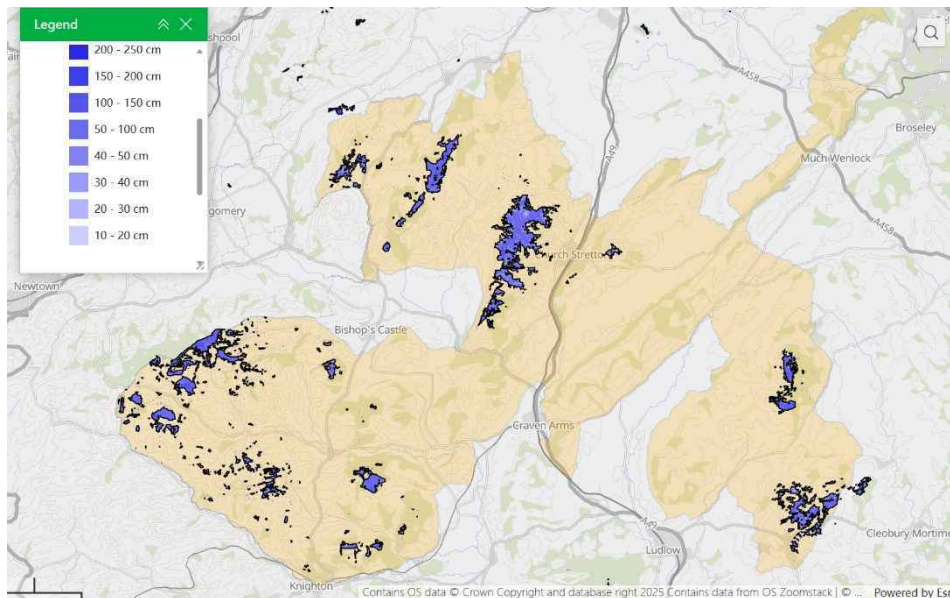
Peat restoration

Targets & Outcomes Framework Target 7 is a national figure, to “restore 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050”.

New data in Natural England's England Peat Map (May 2025) indicates 3,519.8ha of peaty soils in the Shropshire Hills. The majority of this is classified as over 40cm in depth, though the mapping is largely based on modelling and indicates low confidence on depth of peat, and local knowledge suggests deep peat is much more restricted. The area of deep peat in the Shropshire Hills in previous national data was 42 ha.

Most deep peat is in poor condition as habitat, and is also a significant source of carbon emissions, so restoration is a high priority, mainly by restoring natural hydrology (rewetting) in headwater areas.

A target for deep peat restoration for the Shropshire Hills of 2ha per year is suggested (= 56ha 2022 - 2050). Since the area of deep peat in the Shropshire Hills is thought to be relatively small and this is such a high priority, this target equates to trying to restore all of our deep peat by 2050, and there seems no good reason to aim lower than this.



Distribution of peaty soils in the Shropshire Hills
(England Peat Map, Natural England 2025)



Peat with Sphagnum mosses on
the flanks of the Stiperstones

Species – mammals, birds, invertebrates, fish, plants, fungi, micro-organisms, invasive non-native species

The Shropshire Hills spans upland and lowland and includes a mix of species of northern Britain and those more associated with the south. 41% of species have declined in the UK since 1970, and unfortunately the situation in the Shropshire Hills reflects national trends. Some of the threatened species are obscure, but these are nevertheless important parts of ecosystems.

Mammals

11 of the 47 mammals native to Britain are classified as being at risk of extinction, a further five are classified as 'near threatened' and since 1970 the average distribution of mammals has declined by 26%.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills are: Lesser horseshoe bat, Noctule bat, Polecat, Eurasian Otter, Hazel dormouse, European Hare, Harvest Mouse, Hedgehog, Pine marten.



Dormouse

Birds

The Shropshire Hills is important in a regional context for upland and farmland birds, including Curlew, Lapwing, Dipper, and Snipe, but the breeding populations of all these species except Dipper have fallen to critically low levels. As elsewhere, these long-term declines are linked principally to loss of habitat, with predation becoming significant when numbers reach low levels.

Priority bird Species in the Shropshire Hills are:

Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Common Cuckoo, Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Grasshopper Warbler, Kestrel, Nightjar, Pied

Flycatcher, Red Grouse, Snipe, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Willow Tit, Wood Warbler, Lesser Redpoll, Redstart.

Those from the Farmland Bird Assemblage such as Cuckoo, Curlew and Kestrel would benefit to a greater or lesser extent from:

- uncultivated field margins, rich in invertebrates
- more hedgerows, and increasing the width, height and species diversity of those that remain.

Curlew are arguably a special case, as it is regionally and nationally important. Nationally curlew has declined by 65% since 1970. In Shropshire, the population declined by an estimated 77% between 1990 and 2010, down to 160 pairs, with a further decline since. The Shropshire Hills holds around 60 pairs, over 12% of the population south of a line from the Dee to the Wash. Curlew is "the most important bird conservation priority in the UK" (Brown et al, 2015). Predator pressure is known to be a factor, and there is strong evidence from the Shropshire Ornithological Society's Save our Curlews project work that the high level of gamebird releases in contribute to this. Up to 2/3 of released gamebirds may not be shot, and so are available as supplementary food for predators and scavengers including those which take Curlew eggs and chicks (and other ground-nesting birds).



Curlew (Leo Smith)

The Long Mynd is the only site where Whinchat now breed regularly, and it holds the large majority of the Red grouse population (the only other, smaller, population is on The Stiperstones). Whinchat nest primarily in bilberry heath mosaic, and Grouse are totally dependent on heather.

Case study - Pine marten monitoring in the Shropshire Hills

Pine martens are England's rarest mammals and were thought to be extinct in Shropshire for over 100 years. They have been found again recently in the Shropshire Hills and are now being monitored. In 2024, the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust supported three pine marten projects through the Conservation Fund, aiming to empower communities to get involved with surveying for the presence of this mammal in key areas, using camera trapping and den box surveys.

These projects have trained volunteers to use camera traps in woodlands near the Stiperstones, Snailbeach, Poles Coppice, as well as near to Church Stretton and Wenlock Edge. Monitoring by volunteers is also taking place in Wheathill Parish and on Pontesford Hill, with camera traps here helping to confirm whether pine marten are present. At Wheathill, a three mile stretch of Cold Green Dingle is now monitored, informing where to locate den boxes to encourage resting and breeding places for pine marten. The Friends of Pontesford Hill group now has a dedicated volunteer team of 15 people monitoring the site, which will help to inform better management for pine marten here.

A number of public events and talks have also been held, to continue awareness-raising in local communities on the importance of not only pine martens, but the overall need to improve and connect existing habitats and to create better quality habitats to support nature recovery.



Pine marten on camera



Installing cameras at Nipstone

Butterflies, Bees and Beetles

Invertebrates are the very heart of our natural systems but are suffering the greatest declines. As Buglife puts it - "it is the small things that run the planet". Many of our bugs are specialists with specific habitat requirements and therefore at greatest risk from rapid environmental change. There are thousands of UK invertebrate species and two out of three UK bug species are in decline.

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: Grayling, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Wood White, White Letter Hairstreak, Drab Looper, Bilberry bumblebee



Grayling

Molluscs

The Shropshire Hills used to be a stronghold for the freshwater pearl mussel. 16th Century accounts affirm that the River Clun was once carpeted with mussels, perhaps in the hundreds of thousands. These populations were sustained by our unpolluted rivers, but in recent decades populations from the Rivers Teme and Onny have been lost, and the Clun population is now limited to less than one thousand individuals, is contracting in range, and restricted to waters outside the National Landscape. Influenced by unsustainable practices in the Shropshire Hills, recruitment of juveniles is thought to be zero and the Clun population is considered functionally extinct. Critically endangered, the freshwater pearl mussel is at risk of global extinction.

BAP Priority Species: Freshwater pearl mussel - critically endangered and decreasing (occurs just outside the National Landscape)



Freshwater Pearl Mussel

Crustaceans

The Clun, Redlake and Onny catchments support populations of White-clawed crayfish (our only native crayfish).

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: White-clawed crayfish



White-clawed crayfish

Reptiles & Amphibians

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard, Slow Worm, Great Crested Newt, Common Toad



Adder

Fish

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

European Eel, Atlantic salmon, Brown Trout, Grayling, Bullhead, Brook Lamprey, Nine-spine Stickleback, Three-spine Stickleback

Vascular plants

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

Green winged orchid, Marsh Gentian, Lesser Butterfly-orchid, Floating Water Plantain, Annual Knawel, Basil Thyme, Yellow Bird's-nest, Spreading Bellflower, Mountain Pansy, Black poplar



Green-winged orchid

Non-Vascular plants

The Shropshire Hills has one of only 11 sites known in the UK for Marsh Flapwort (*Biantheridion undulifolium*), an endangered species found in hillside wet flushes.

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: Marsh flapwort



Marsh Flapwort

Des Callaghan, British Bryological Society

Micro-organisms

There is greater understanding of the role of beneficial micro-organisms e.g. in soil and animal health. This can help at a cultural level us to see that we are highly connected to and dependent upon other living things, which is the basis of a healthy and sustainable relationship with nature.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

There were 2,000 invasive non-native species in Great Britain in 2021, with 10-12 new ones becoming established every year, mirroring the global trend. They threaten biodiversity and ecosystems and have significant economic impacts. Climate change is expected to increase the risk from invasives, through more frost-free winters and increased flooding events, and stress on habitats causing more vulnerability.

The most prevalent invasive species in the Shropshire Hills are those that are common across the country, in terrestrial and freshwater habitats. Along riparian corridors, Himalayan balsam is widespread, causing erosion to river banks, forming dense stands that suppress native plants and reduce biodiversity. Management and eradication of this rigorous plant is challenging and most effective if carried out at a catchment-scale as the plant uses watercourses for seed dispersal.

Populations of the native white-clawed crayfish are under increasing threat from the widespread North American signal crayfish, which out compete our native crayfish and act as a vector the fungal disease 'crayfish plague'. The signal crayfish are also known to modify aquatic habitats, through extensive bank burrowing, causing erosion and sediment release.

Natural processes, biosphere integrity

Nature is not just species and habitats, but natural processes and natural systems which shape and support our everyday lives, such as the water cycle, carbon and nutrient cycles, soil formation and climate regulation.

The biosphere is the whole living system on which we depend. We can't just keep a few pieces of it as protected bits of biodiversity. We need to maintain the integrity of the biosphere which includes bio-abundance (retaining large number of any species) and healthy natural processes.

Dynamic habitats and processes

What habitat classifications can overlook is that what is best for nature is habitat mosaics and dynamism. Our birds, invertebrates, etc all evolved in a dynamic environment, with both dense and more broken wooded areas through to open heath and grassland, across a spectrum of wet to drier ground. We no longer have the bison, woolly rhinos, wild boars, etc which maintained this dynamic landscape and we tend now to manage land in neat parcels – fields, woods, ponds, hedges, etc. Where possible we should look to allow space for nature to be dynamic, and make our interventions mimic the effects of the large wild herbivores and carnivores which are no longer here.

Living systems

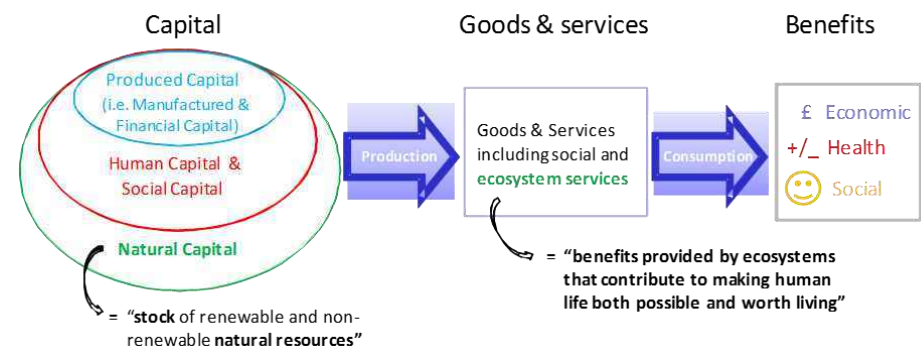
The growing understanding of living systems has great relevance to the Plan. This approach recognises their complexity, but also acknowledges that living systems have ability to regenerate themselves. They are not machine systems that we need to control, initiate or apply force to change. Living systems understanding recognises interconnectedness and that interdependent systems are nested at different scales. They tend to create conditions conducive to life, and we can nurture these conditions to allow living systems to regenerate. They are dynamic and adapt, they change and evolve, but can be destabilised. These principles apply to 'natural' ecosystems, but we can apply them also to what we see as 'human' systems, which are also living and inter-connected with natural ones.

The ecosystem approach recognises that:

- Natural systems are complex and dynamic, and their healthy functioning should not be taken for granted.
- People benefit from services provided by the natural environment. These services underpin social and economic wellbeing and have a value – both monetary and non-monetary.
- Those that benefit from these services and those who are involved in managing them should play a central role in making decisions about them.

Natural capital and ecosystem services are ways to think about the value which nature has to humans, though are sometimes criticised for encouraging an overly utilitarian and human-centric view.

Natural capital is the stock of natural assets that provide free goods and services, often called ecosystem services, that benefit wider society as a whole. Natural capital stock includes renewable and non-renewable natural resources e.g. geology, minerals, soils, water, air, plants, animals, habitats, ecosystem. Some ecosystem services are well known e.g. food, fibre and fuel provision and cultural services supporting wellbeing through recreation. Others less obvious include regulation of climate and water quality.



Pests, diseases and biosecurity

Since everything in living systems is connected, with climate and ecosystem change these are increasingly an issue - with new diseases such as Ash Dieback affecting trees, bird flu affecting poultry and wild birds, and through threats or potential threats to livestock from diseases such as Bluetongue and Foot & Mouth. Most biosecurity measures are taken by those working within the relevant industries, though with some pathogens and at times of heightened threat, biosecurity measures by members of the public can become very important too. There are sometimes cross-overs to risk to human health too, further raising the importance of upstream preventative work where at all possible.

Air quality

Air in the National Landscape is relatively clean regarding human health, but ammonia and aerial nitrogen deposition are significantly affecting habitats. There are examples of wildlife sites already at c200% to 600% of their Critical Levels or Loads of nitrogen (i.e. levels above which species will be lost and habitats damaged). The cumulative impacts of intensive poultry units is a factor in levels of ammonia.

Biodiversity Net Gain associated with new development has potential to contribute positively to the landscape's natural beauty, biodiversity, and community value. It offers an avenue to support landscape character and enhance the natural environment alongside new development, for example by linking and strengthening environmental networks or supporting landscape character by integrating nature-based solutions that reflect local distinctiveness. The Shropshire Hills has relatively low levels of development and the hierarchy in the system requires that on or near-site BNG measures be used wherever possible. The scale of BNG as a mechanism for the Shropshire Hills is therefore likely to be relatively low, but it could nevertheless be a useful tool in places. The BNG system is expected to continue to evolve, with changes expected especially for smaller developments.

Key link to other Plan themes - Nature connection for people

"Nature connection is about our sense of relationship with the rest of nature – how we think about, feel towards and engage with the natural world."

Nature Connected Communities Handbook, University of Derby

People more connected to nature so that they care about it and see the benefits to their wellbeing, quality of life and prosperity.

Nature connection is not just about knowledge, but about emotional connection. It is associated with greater wellbeing for individuals, and pro-environmental behaviours including active participation in caring for nature. It is a route to us establishing a new and harmonious relationship in which we are a part of nature and can influence it positively rather than just reducing the harm we do.

Five pathways to nature connection have been defined:

Senses - Exploring and experiencing nature through all the senses

Beauty - Seeking and appreciating the beauty of the natural world

Emotion – Noticing and welcoming the feelings nature inspires

Meaning – Celebrating and sharing nature's events and stories

Compassion – helping and caring for nature

If you pause for a moment and think about a favourite place that you associate with nature, you probably feel a sense of calm, just in a few moments. It's a known thing that nature makes us feel better. We as humans evolved in nature, as part of it, those connections are deep rooted within all of us. People in hospital recover more quickly if they have a view of trees or nature, or even a picture of it on the wall. You felt calmer just by thinking about it, in a few seconds. So we know from our own experience that nature is good for us. Of course we need natural resources and processes actually to survive and live – clean air, water, growing food, but nature is also good for our wellbeing. Even the health value of physical exercise has been shown to be greater when it's done in a natural setting compared to indoors.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties – Nature (not exhaustive)

Strengthened duty to seek to further the purpose of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance natural beauty

Strengthened 'biodiversity duty' on public bodies

Biodiversity net gain from new development

SSSI duties for public bodies and other occupiers

Protected species legislation

Environmental Impact Assessment requirements e.g. for ploughing up semi-natural grasslands

Controls on tree felling - Tree Preservation Orders and trees in Conservation Areas, felling licence requirements

Regulations relating to pests and diseases



Nature connection is not just about knowledge,
but about emotional connection

PLAN POLICIES - NATURE

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

3. Existing assets

i) Further harm to nature should be prevented, and opportunities sought to enhance the status or condition of current nature assets. Designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) should be protected, maintained and enhanced.

ii) Appropriate use should be made of regulatory mechanisms to protect nature, e.g. protected species.

iii) Irreplaceable habitats should be protected (as defined at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/irreplaceable-habitats>).

iv) Habitats and species of principal importance for nature conservation should be maintained and enhanced.

v) Natural capital should be protected and enhanced.

4. Nature Recovery

i) The recovery of nature should be encouraged through all opportunities, especially through public support for farmers and connected with built development and land use change.

ii) The nature recovery network of good quality habitats should be enhanced, as set out in maps and priorities of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

iii) Ecological networks and green infrastructure should be maintained, and their connectivity enhanced through targeted habitat creation and restoration.

iv) The area's contribution to the 30 by 30 target should be maximised, and to the wider Convention on Biological Diversity goal of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.

5. Development

i) Development under the planning system should have regard to the biodiversity duty, make use of wildlife surveys where necessary, and use the mitigation hierarchy: Avoid – Minimise – Mitigate – Offset.

6. Woodland and Trees

i) Ancient woodlands should be protected and managed, and Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites restored, according to good practice. All existing woodlands should be sustainably managed, for environmental, social and economic factors.

ii) The cover of native broadleaved woodland should be expanded with appropriate species in suitable locations, as set out in guidance within and referenced by this Plan.

iii) New planting of woodland should follow the highest standards of design to support landscape, nature, heritage and amenity. The proportion of native broadleaved trees should be as high as possible in commercial woods, and planting projects should be encouraged to deliver a higher proportion of broadleaves than conifers. The design of new woodland should take into consideration long term management and access requirements for harvesting and extraction.

iv) Trees outside woodlands should be cared for and retained where possible, and planting of trees outside woodlands should be increased – including hedgerow trees, wood pasture and agro-forestry. Opportunities should be sought to integrate trees and woodland more with farming, and to raise awareness of their agricultural benefits.

v) Where felling is to take place, high standards of resource protection (soils, water, etc) should be adopted, and opportunities should be taken to improve woodland design for landscape and to facilitate nature recovery.

vi) Where justified by a site's importance for open habitats, the on-site reduction in woodland footprint to enable the creation or restoration of open habitats should be allowed.

7. Other habitats

i) Where possible space should be allowed for dynamic evolution of habitats, and human interventions adjusted to mimic the more natural past disturbances of large wild animals.

ii) Hedgerows and hedge banks should be maintained and managed for optimum wildlife value. Management using traditional methods such as hedge laying is encouraged.

iii) Creation of new hedgerows is encouraged. Planting should follow best practice, using a mix of native species characteristic of the local landscape.

iv) Areas of deep peat within the Shropshire Hills should be protected, and efforts made to improve their management and condition, especially by restoring more natural hydrology.

v) Wetland areas such as ponds, lakes, mires, flushes and wet woodland should be protected and restored where necessary. Creation of new wetland habitats in suitable locations is encouraged, avoiding harm to any existing features of value.

vi) Species-rich meadows, unimproved grassland and higher quality road verges should be managed for their biodiversity value.

8. People's connection to nature

i) Opportunities should be taken to support greater connection to nature across all of society, including emotional connection, public engagement, education programmes and interpretation.

Plan Recommendations - Nature

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

N 1. Support implementation of priorities and actions set out in the Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy, by farmers and landowners as well as smaller scale action by smallholders, community groups and individuals.

N 2. Support Parish scale action for nature, including local nature recovery strategies, management of public land, and support for action by farmers, smallholders and for wildlife gardening.

N 3. Influence national policy relating to nature, especially to emphasise the benefits of nature, to ensure consistency with other policy areas and to avoid portraying nature as a constraint.

N 4. Support strong delivery of new farm incentives for nature through Environmental Land Management (ELM).

N 5. Follow the Plan's guidance below about favoured locations for appropriate tree planting, focused as far as possible on native species:

- i. In field corners and hedgerows where individual trees and small groups of trees will enhance the landscape
- ii. Along watercourses and in upland dingles, and where planting will buffer, extend or link woods, especially ancient woodland
- iii. Replacement planting where mature trees may have to be removed
- iv. Avoiding land take of higher agricultural value land
- v. Avoiding sites of archaeological interest
- vi. Avoiding land which is valuable open habitat, e.g. species-rich grasslands, meadows, heathlands or wetlands, except in character with mosaic habitats
- vii. Avoiding locations within 1km of nest sites of ground-nesting birds, to avoid improving conditions for predators. Every effort should be made to check local and national records of such birds.

N 6. Optimise delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain in the Shropshire Hills.

N 7. Maximise benefits of the new Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve (incorporating land of a number of partners).

N 8. Support management of deer populations in a careful and sustainable way to enable natural regeneration in woodlands and enable planted trees to grow.

N 9. Raise awareness of ffridd and scrub habitats which are undervalued.

N 10. Improve the resilience of all woodlands and plantations to the effects of climate change.

N 11. Seek to minimise the harm from pests and diseases affecting wild populations by raising awareness and following best practice including biosecurity.

N 12. Control invasive non-native species where needed, according to best practice guidelines.

N 13. Support provision of adequate advisory capacity on nature for different types of people – including farmers, smallholders and community groups, consulting them on their needs.

N 14. Continue to develop the network of community wildlife groups.

N 15. Continue networking organisation for small meadow owners (Marches Meadows Group).

N 16. Rewilding initiatives should take account of the current nature value of land, and any nature conservation value which derives from a long history of sensitive management, which may be best to continue. Any species reintroduction should be done through official mechanisms.

N 17. Improve data and knowledge regarding key evidence gaps on nature, and share more nature recovery case studies. Continue to gather and make available data on nature, including through expansion of citizen science approaches.

Plan Aspirations - Nature

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Aspirations are)

N(a). Secure funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund for a Shropshire Hills Landscape Connections project delivering at a large scale for nature recovery (along with other project elements).

N(b). Explore opportunities for Green Finance and seek to develop some demonstration projects to help people understand the opportunities and potential pitfalls.

N(c). Expand conservation ownership of key sites which come on the market by suitable community or conservation organisations where appropriate.

N(d). Connect organisations who are active on nature – to share knowledge and ideas.

N(e). Develop area and theme-based projects for nature, e.g. rivers, grassland, wetlands, etc. linking with other objectives.

N(f). Create new habitat to meet the Targets & Outcomes Framework target 1.

N(g). Targeted work on priority species, e.g. curlew, butterflies, including through local species action plans.

N(h). Ancient and veteran trees should be recorded and have appropriate management plans to retain their landscape and biodiversity benefits.

N(i). Reinstate advisory capacity for owners of Local Wildlife Sites.

N(j). Encourage skills development for relevant people to support nature recovery.

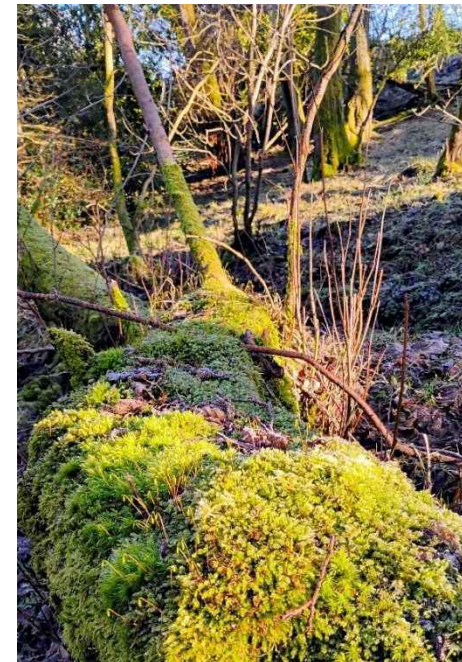
N(k). Expand community initiatives to grow and plant trees.

N(l). Support people to take inspiration from their experiences of nature in the Shropshire Hills to become more sustainable and pro-environmental in their behaviours and choices.

N(m). Increase the proportion of people who spend time in nature, especially creating opportunities for those who currently do not participate.

N(n). Include regular content on the theme of nature in public communication and engagement.

N(o). Use themes from the [People's Plan for Nature](#) to support engagement: Vision & Leadership, Regulation & Implementation, Nature-friendly Farming, Food Production and Consumption, Waterway & Catchment Management, Local Access to Nature, Using Evidence Effectively.



Extracts from Vision:

Climate

is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

- Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to net zero in all areas - energy and buildings, transport, land use, etc
- Nature-based solutions are deployed at scale
- Adaptation is active for nature, infrastructure and the economy and society

Subsections in this 'Climate' section of the Plan:

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions – pathway to net zero, in all sectors

Carbon storage and sequestration in land and soil

Adaptation, including risk assessment and reporting

Renewable energy

Attitudes and behaviour change

Just transition

*Key link to other Plan themes - **Nature-based solutions***

"We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it."

Barack Obama, Former US President, 2015



Climate Change has become a central issue for protected landscapes as the urgency of the climate crisis has ramped up. 2024 was the hottest year on record and records continue to be broken. As shown below, the sharp increase in global atmospheric CO₂ levels within the lifespan of the Shropshire Hills AONB due to fossil fuel use is greater than the range of natural fluctuations over the previous 800,000 years. Globally, despite all our efforts, greenhouse gas emissions are still rising.



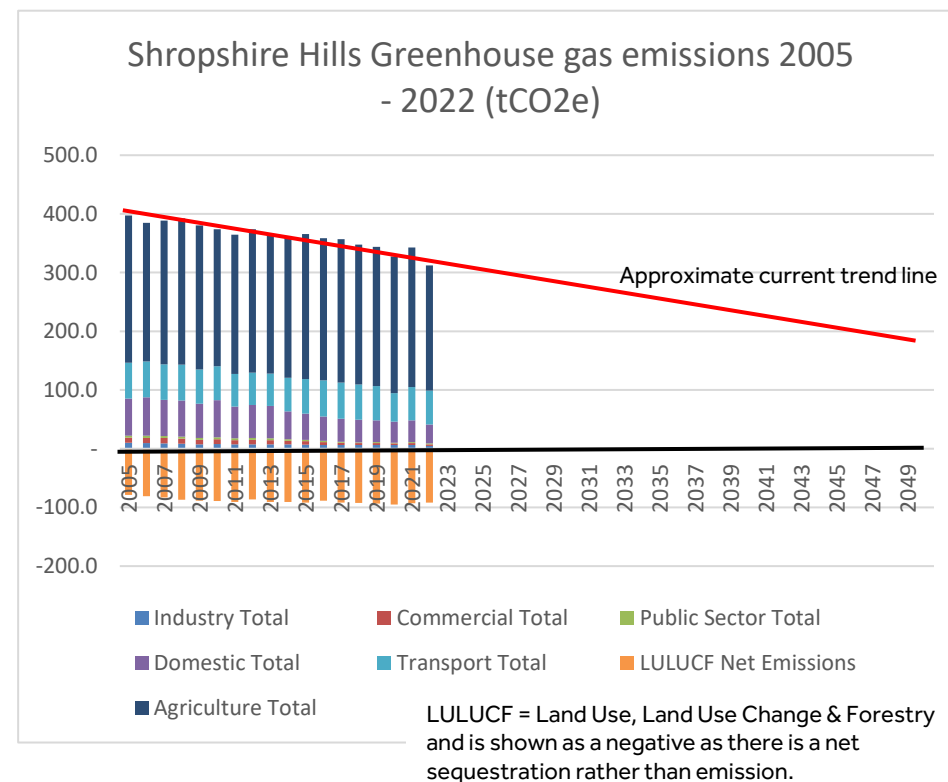
The relatively stable period of climate through the Holocene era which has enabled humans to thrive is coming to an end, unless we act faster. As in other topics of this Plan, there is a lot of good activity locally, but not at sufficient scale and pace, and too many factors and activities are still pushing the wrong way. This plan covers the second half of the decade to 2030, a period described as critical to achieving the Paris Agreement target of holding global heating to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, and to avoid levels of climate change which threaten the future of humanity.

Global commitments of Protected Areas on climate change are set out in the Protected and Conserved Areas Joint Statement.

The national statement of commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action of April 2022 states that “[National Landscape] teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.” The Chairs pledged to “Empower our partnerships to explore their full potential in terms of climate action: what they can deliver directly and what they can influence.”

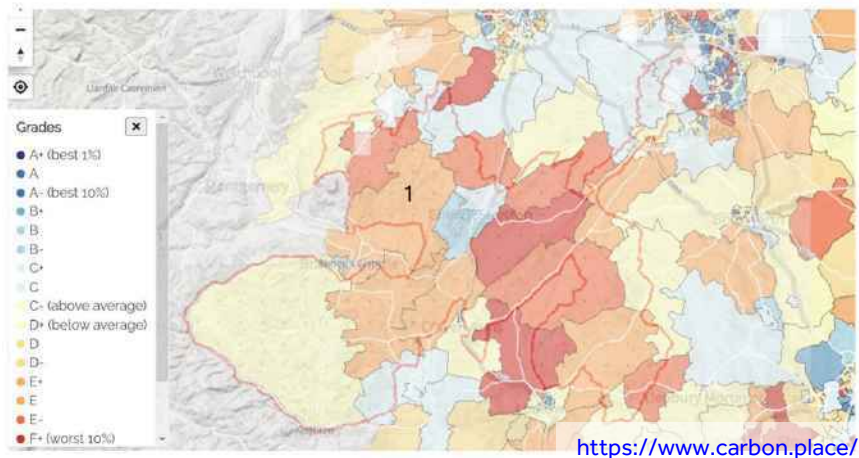
Reducing greenhouse gas emissions – a pathway to net zero, in all sectors

The government data for greenhouse gas emissions (which exclude consumption-based emissions and so are not a complete picture) show a noticeable reduction over the last 20 years, as below. However the rate of reduction is only about half what is required to reach net zero by 2050.



Evidence shows that per capita emissions in the Shropshire Hills are higher than the national average. This is partly a consequence of the rural nature of the area leading to higher emissions from domestic energy and transport, but is also linked to high levels of consumption.

Carbon emissions by super-output area in the Shropshire Hills

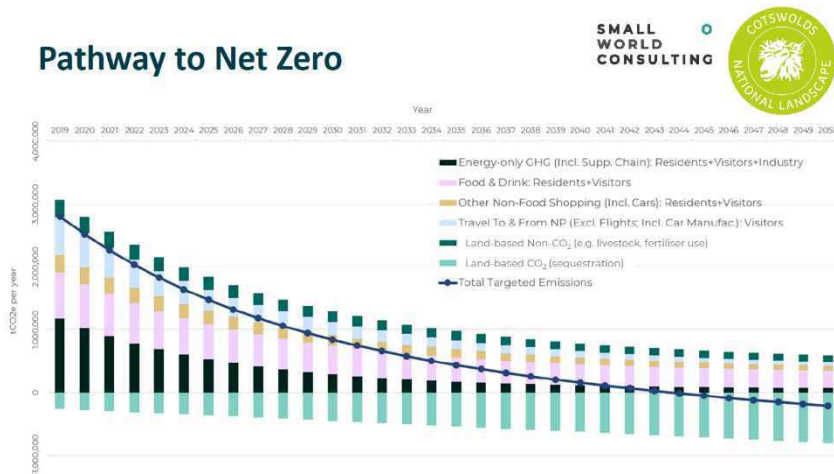


<https://www.carbon.place/>

Red shows highest emissions through yellow to blue showing lowest emissions

We need to promote an 'emissions descent' pathway as below from the Cotswolds. This will require energy transition, demand reduction, behavioural as well as technological change, and action in all sectors.

Pathway to Net Zero



The National Landscapes Association collaborative work on climate change identified priorities in relation to five headings – agriculture, sustainable tourism and transport, buildings and energy efficiency, renewable energy, and nature-based solutions. These form the basis of this Plan's approach.

Agriculture - Overall goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from farming (including CO₂, methane and N₂O) while continuing to produce healthy and nutritious food, improving long and short-term food security and enabling nature recovery.

Greenhouse gas emissions from land and farming need to be reduced while continuing to produce food. We need farming systems which improve soil condition and integrate with nature (such as regenerative/ agro-ecological), plus changes to the food system and diets.

Sustainable transport and tourism - Overall goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport and tourism, continuing to meet people's needs but challenging hypermobile trends of travel and reducing demand, at the same time improving health and wellbeing.

We need to adapt tourism infrastructure and influence visitor behaviours, connect people better to nature, support active travel, and access for all.

Buildings and energy efficiency - Overall goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from domestic and commercial buildings, new and existing.

We need better resilience and sustainability in new buildings, retrofit for large numbers of older existing houses, and to take account of landscape sensitivity.

The content for renewable energy and nature-based solutions is included within the headings later in this section.

Carbon storage and sequestration in land and soil

The National Landscapes Association worked with Cranfield University in 2022 and gained a lot of knowledge of carbon in land in our landscapes. Key learning points included:

- A variety of habitats and land cover types within National Landscapes are valuable carbon stores with good potential for carbon sequestration.
- Soil carbon stock (carbon per ha) is generally higher in priority habitats than other land types .
- Peat soils have the highest soil carbon stocks .
- The bulk of carbon is stored within the soil rather than biomass.
- Emissions are associated mainly with arable land (and peatlands which are not wet enough).
- The first priorities are about holding on to important carbon stores and reducing/stopping emissions from land.

Types of land which are important because they are carbon-rich:

- Extensive areas of high organic content soil in upland grassland.
- Woodlands – strongly sequestering Carbon.
- Peatlands (these are not well represented by the habitat/ land use classes used) - hold a big Carbon store for their size (related to depth), but lots are in poor condition and still emitting Carbon.



Shallow peat soils in the headwaters of the Clun catchment

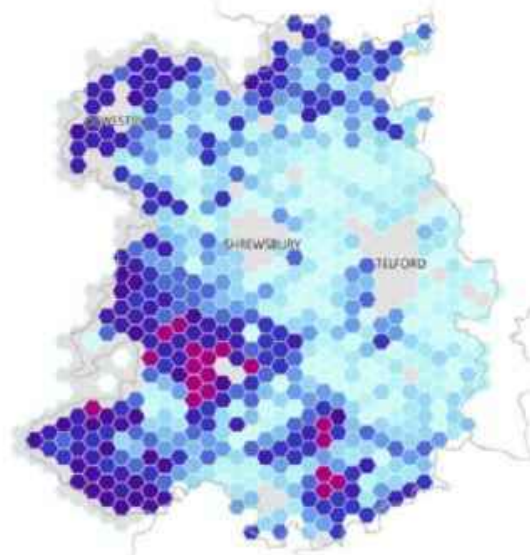
Types of land which are important because large areas are present:

- Big carbon stores in arable land but these are generally emitting.
- Big carbon stores in grassland - these are generally holding it or emitting very slowly (carbon balance of grasslands is variable).

Generic actions which will optimise carbon storage and sequestration in land and soil in the Shropshire Hills:

- Support agricultural practices which raise soil organic carbon in grassland and arable land.
- Reduce carbon loss in arable land by reducing tillage where possible.
- Expand tree and woodland cover in ways sympathetic to nature, farming and landscape.
- Increase trees outside woods and grow hedges to larger volume.
- Rewet peat areas to reduce and then halt emissions.
- Protect heathland and manage sensitively.
- Stabilise the large areas of high organic content soil by reducing intensity of land management.

WMHC Soil Carbon/Organic Matter (ID: 59)
Mean estimates of carbon density in topsoil (0-15cm depth) – tonnes per hectare; mapped using data produced from Natural England and CEH's 'Mapping Natural Capital' project: Soil carbon (Henrys et al., 2012). N.b. This dataset is statistically extrapolated to a national level from CEH Countryside Survey data 2007.



The soils of the Shropshire Hills are significantly high in carbon/organic matter in the context of the county (Natural England)
(pale blue lowest through dark blue then red to highest)

Adaptation, including risk assessment and reporting

Global heating is already having a clear impact in the UK through warmer wetter winters, hotter drier summers, and more frequent extreme weather events – including heatwaves, intense rainfall events, and storms with high winds. Projections indicate that these trends will continue and grow. Even in the best scenarios of emissions reductions and climate stabilisation, the changes in climate already ‘locked in’ are likely to create significant impacts which will affect all aspects of the economy, society, infrastructure and the natural environment. Climate justice requires us to acknowledge that the vulnerability of different people to the effects of climate change is very unequal, and globally those most at risk have contributed least to causing the problem.

The effects of climate change include interacting risks, in-combination effects, thresholds and tipping points. The severity of impacts from greater levels of warming such as 3 or 4 degrees which we are still headed for, would exceed the capacity of adaptation responses and are existential for human civilisation and the ecosystems in which we live. This is the reality of the Climate and Ecological Emergency and the evidence is strong that collectively we are not doing nearly enough.

The indirect effects of climate change in other parts of the world will affect geopolitics and our economy, and these influences are likely to prove at least as significant for the Shropshire Hills as any direct bioclimatic effects. Continued integration of adaptation with reducing emissions and with nature recovery and action to stay within other planetary boundaries remains vitally important. This requires international collaboration and overcoming barriers to action including fear, apathy, misinformation and vested interests.

National Landscapes have contributed collectively to the current round of Government reporting in the National Adaptation Programme (NAP4). There is a requirement for each protected landscape to have a Climate Change Adaptation plan by 2028. The information here is a preliminary risk assessment and identification of actions, which will be elaborated through a fuller process by 2028. Work on this topic for the National Landscape needs to be a guide, and to link to activity of the local authorities and other partners, since the management of infrastructure and property does not rest with the National Landscape team.

The UN Environment Programme’s global foresight report ‘Navigating New Horizons’ identifies that **climate change is part of the ‘polycrisis’ of interconnected environmental and societal challenges facing the world**. These have implications for global security, conflict and forced displacement of people. The study identifies that these systemic problems require systemic solutions based on values – a new social contract, engaging a more diverse range of stakeholders, giving young people a voice and rethinking measures of progress to go beyond GDP. The report also identifies that communities and local level networks and initiatives play a major role in coping with short-term shocks and building long-term resilience and adaptive capacities. It highlights the importance of robust local government leadership to provide the necessary governance and structural arrangements, and links with national authorities. Within protected landscapes we need to do all of our local work in the context of global challenges, since the scale of these means that we just can’t succeed in maintaining our landscapes as ‘islands’ of sustainability. The approaches recommended in this Plan fit well with the solutions identified in the UNEP report, if they can be implemented.

The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment CRA3 (2021) by the Climate Change Committee identified the following 8 top risks:

1. Risks to the viability and diversity of terrestrial and freshwater **habitats and species** from multiple hazards
2. Risks to **soil health** from increased flooding and drought
3. Risks to **natural carbon stores** and sequestration from multiple hazards leading to increased emissions
4. Risks to **crops, livestock and commercial trees** from multiple hazards
5. Risks to **supply of food, goods and vital services** due to climate-related collapse of supply chains and distribution networks
6. Risks to people and the economy from climate-related failure of the **power system**
7. Risks to human health, wellbeing and productivity from increased **exposure to heat** in homes and other buildings
8. Multiple risks to the UK from climate change **impacts overseas**

An outline assessment of risks relative to features of the Shropshire Hills is below:

Feature/characteristic of the Shropshire Hills	Headline <u>risks</u> and implications of climate change (to be set out more fully in Adaptation Plan)
Varied geology and topography	The landscape provides a big variety of conditions, which may help species to adapt.
Soils	<u>Vulnerability to soil erosion. Surface water flooding.</u>
Relatively fragmented habitats	Less connectivity for species to move through the landscape.
Upland habitats	Heath and moorlands at greater risk of <u>wildfire</u> . <u>Drought</u> , including in-combination effects e.g. greater susceptibility to heather beetle.
Woodlands	Change in growing conditions for trees. <u>Drought</u> affecting new planting. <u>More tree diseases</u> as a result of warming and loss of cold winter periods.
Veteran trees	Risk of <u>loss of trees</u> in storm events.
Hedgerows	Potential pressure on land use affecting hedges.
Grasslands	Extremes of <u>water availability</u> .
Rivers and streams	Greater risk of <u>drying up</u> in drought periods. Increased flooding especially where very modified. <u>Declines in water quality</u> due to storm run-off.
Wetlands	Risk of <u>drying out</u> . But of importance in retaining water and reducing wildfire risk.
Farming	Changes in crop suitability. Availability of grazing. Differing value and responses of land for water retention. <u>Waterlogging of land</u> in winter and flood periods. Risk of <u>loss of income or livelihoods</u> .
Archaeological sites	Risk of <u>fire and land disturbance</u> .
Heritage buildings	Greater risk of <u>damage from extreme weather</u> . Older buildings are often better at remaining cool in hot weather.
Road infrastructure	Large network of minor lanes. <u>Damage to road surfaces</u> due to extreme weather – storms and heat
Rural power grid	Potential extra pressure on grid and more outages.
Private water supplies	Potential for groundwater supplies to be depleted.
Path network	Path surfaces and small bridges especially vulnerable to <u>flood damage</u> .
Scenic quality	Changes to landscape and views.
Environmental quality	Threats to water and air quality from increased flooding and fires.
Towns and villages	Vulnerability to flooding, and potentially wildfire.
Older population	Increased likelihood of higher deaths due to extreme weather especially <u>heat related illness</u> .

Potential actions in response to climate risks for the Shropshire Hills (these overlap with actions for other goals)

Land and water

Build a connected nature recovery network of habitats.

Rewet catchment headwaters.

Water storage and infrastructure for farms e.g. solar pumps, distributed stock watering, restructuring of field boundaries.

Regenerative methods for pastures such as rotational grazing can be more robust to drought.

Infrastructure

Build resilience in Infrastructure – transport, etc.

Adapt design e.g. shade in public spaces.

Building and property adaptation for extreme weather.

Increase rainwater storage.

Prevent ‘maladaptive’ actions e.g. increasing reliance on private cars, building on flood-prone land.

Society

Localise to enhance resilience but remain interdependent and collaborative – e.g. food systems, local energy.

Strengthen community resilience and maintain social cohesion. Shared public spaces (built or green spaces) have an important role to bring people together. Community groups and local governance structures are vital.

Give priority to values, truth and justice, and to necessary skills of thinking, relating, collaborating and acting.

Strengthen nature connection – to realise that we are part of with nature and need to nurture the conditions for life.

Reduce inequality – focus on meeting people’s needs and avoiding excess consumption. Use better measures of progress.

Encourage responsible recreation – including avoiding wildfire risk, reducing water consumption, using active travel, and avoiding damage to sensitive sites.

Encourage citizen science.

Renewable energy

Previous Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plans have since 2009 championed the necessary shift to low carbon, and supported approaches to renewable energy which are compatible with the special qualities and other key characteristics of the Shropshire Hills. Approaches are also favoured which support a transition to more decentralised zero carbon energy systems that empower and benefit local communities, with broader sustainability benefits.

Wind generation has been effectively prevented by national planning policy over recent years, since it had to be supported by a Neighbourhood Plan, and these are so limited in coverage. There is also no policy to guide planning applications for wind microgeneration in the National Landscape. It could be argued that the relative lack of action to expand sensitive small scale renewable generation in the area increases the likelihood of large development proposals which could be harmful to the National Landscape.

The National Association collaborative climate change work defined the **overall goal for renewable energy as: Facilitate an increase in generation of renewable energy in National Landscapes which does not harm their special qualities.** We need a better national strategy and local planning for renewables.

It should be possible to achieve a very substantial increase in renewable energy generation in Shropshire without harm to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, but achieving the balance is more likely to be achieved by having a clear strategy and policy for renewables in the county, drawing on best practice from other areas and utilising tools such as landscape character and capacity assessment. Raising community engagement on the topic of renewable energy through the development of policy and consultation will help to advance much needed renewable generation, and to close the gap between general high levels of public support in principle and the frequently observed resistance to particular local proposals.

Attitudes and behaviour change

Action on climate change needs to be done at all levels – government, businesses, communities, individuals, etc, and these levels can all help to reinforce each other. The responsibility for climate action should not be all loaded onto individuals, but individual change is integrally linked with system change – in driving societal change and influencing governments. Households and people in the top percentages of income have disproportionately large emissions, and have the greatest responsibility to reduce these.

The social behavioural model describes how people are influenced by those around them, and how there are ‘social tipping points’. Small scale changes can lead to more, and can change the way people perceive themselves – action can influence attitudes as well as the other way round.

Climate Outreach specialise in social science insights and have looked at the difference of attitudes and behaviours in rural communities, which is relevant to our area. They find that climate change is of high concern to rural citizens (87%) across the political spectrum. 60% of rural citizens think that we are already feeling the effects of climate change (c.f. 56% urban), and rural citizens have high civic and political participation. Compared to those in urban areas, rural citizens are more likely to engage certain actions to reduce their climate impact:

- Recycle, re-use plastic
- Reduce electricity use
- Buy local food
- Improve home insulation
- Switch to renewable energy
- Holiday near home

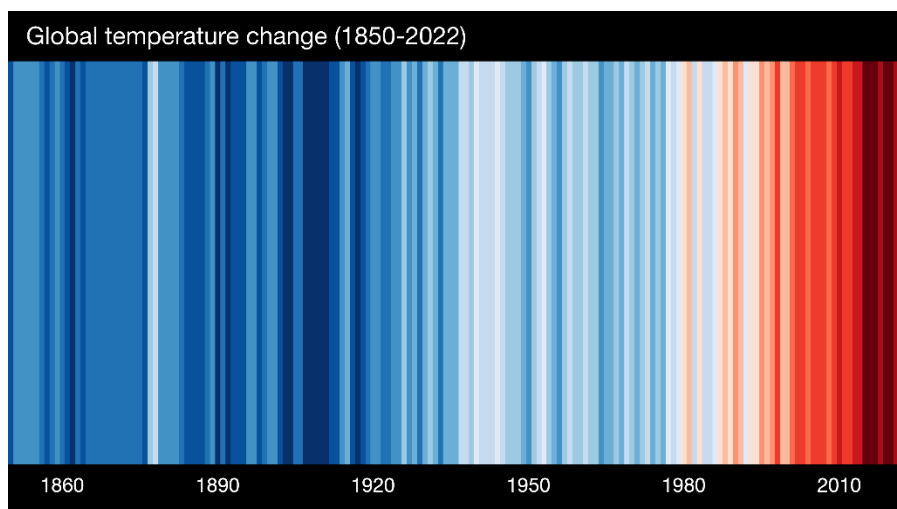
Rural citizens are less likely to:

- Walk, cycle, and use public transport
- Vote for a political party based on their climate policies
- Attend a climate change protest

Just transition

The impacts of climate change on people are uneven and so too are the impacts of attempts to mitigate carbon emissions. For many climate impacts it is the most vulnerable in society that will be most impacted and who also have the least ability to adapt. Adaptation actions to address these risks will also themselves have unequal impacts, and these may be different to those arising from the climate risks that they are seeking to avoid. There is potential for some adaptation actions to have unintended negative effects, increasing exposure of others to climate risks.

Action to enable a 'just' transition tries to combat this inequality to bring about fairer outcomes as the world transitions to decarbonisation, maximising the benefits of climate action and minimising the negative impacts for workers and their communities. The climate change transition process should be fair and involve all communities, ensuring that no communities are unduly impacted. The importance of the just transition is recognised at the international level through its inclusion in the 2015 Paris Agreement.



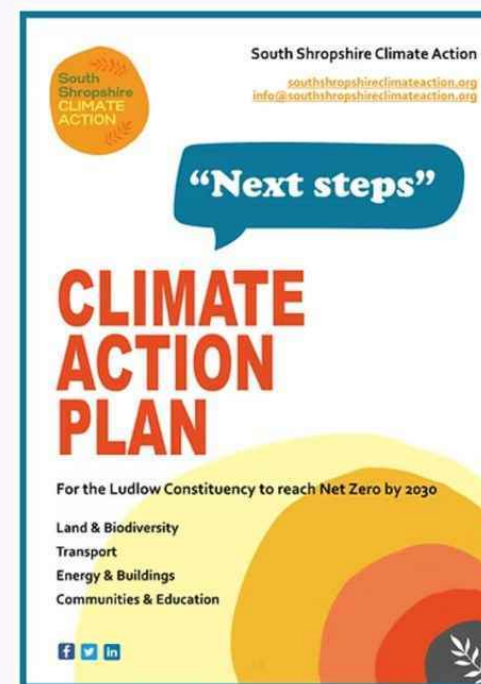
Professor Ed Hawkins (University of Reading) <https://showyourstripes.info/>

Case study – South Shropshire Climate Action Plan

South Shropshire Climate Action produced in 2021 the 'Next Steps' Climate Action Plan for the Ludlow constituency to reach Net Zero by 2030. This was accompanied by two major local conferences which generated a lot of engagement, and was a big achievement for a community group

The Plan makes recommendations across headings of Land and Biodiversity, Energy and Buildings, Transport, Communities and Education. The group has now merged into the county level group of Shropshire Climate Action.

"In telling the truth about the Climate Emergency, we acknowledge that the future is uncertain, difficult and dangerous, but also full of opportunity and hope. In our choices we can improve life, creating an inclusive and fair society for all, sharing resources equally and respecting differences."



Key link to other Plan themes - Nature-based solutions

The National Association collaborative climate change work defined the **overall goal for nature-based solutions as: Safeguard the carbon stores in our landscape, reduce emissions from land and increase carbon sequestration, in ways which are compatible with nature.** Halt and reverse the loss of good quality habitats and restore and recreate habitat networks across the landscape.

The integration of nature-based climate solutions with actions for nature recovery is vital. We must be “nature positive and carbon negative” at the same time. Measures adopted will often have other ecosystem benefits such as flood attenuation and also climate change adaptation benefits to improve resilience. They also connect with climate change mitigation and adaptation through agriculture and forestry – we must look at nature-based solutions holistically. Land (and water) delivers many benefits and services and must not be thought of just in terms of carbon. Nature-based solutions have an important role for tackling climate change, but Carbon offsetting mustn’t harm nature or be used as an easy way of avoiding the necessary deep cuts in emissions in all sectors.

The most relevant nature-based solutions for the Shropshire Hills are:

- Peatland restoration
- Woodland creation and management
- Water, wetlands and natural flood management
- Grassland and heath – creation and management



Summary of statutory requirements and duties - Climate (not exhaustive)

Legally binding government targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions - halve emissions by 2030, net zero by 2050

Climate change risk assessment and adaptation reporting duty on public bodies

Planning requirements for energy efficiency in new development (imminent implementation of Future Homes Standard)



PLAN POLICIES - CLIMATE

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Policies are)

9. Integrated action

i) Action needs to be taken at the Shropshire Hills level on both climate change mitigation and adaptation, and these aspects should be linked and integrated as far as possible.

10. Mitigation

i) Measures to mitigate climate change should remain integrated with and not harm action for nature recovery.

ii) Greenhouse gas emissions linked to the Shropshire Hills should be reduced in all sectors on a clear pathway to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.

iii) Developments, activities and trends which increase greenhouse gas emissions should be resisted.

iv) The large existing carbon store in land should be safeguarded by halting losses, and sequestration in land increased.

v) Demand should be reduced in energy use and transport, as well as changing energy sources to renewable technologies. Insulation and retrofit of energy saving measures should be accelerated in existing and especially older buildings.

11. Adaptation

i) Action for climate change adaptation and to increase resilience in all ways should be supported. All development should support adaptation of the landscape, infrastructure and society to the significant risks and impacts of climate change.

ii) Nature-based solutions should be applied at scale to increase carbon storage and for climate resilience.

12. Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

i) Small scale and community-led renewable energy installations should be encouraged. Community low-carbon initiatives in keeping with the Plan's priorities should be supported, and renewable energy proposals should be assessed on a range of sustainability criteria.

ii) Ground-mounted solar installations in the National Landscape should be at appropriate scales and locations and should:

- be out of prominent view from key publicly accessible vantage points;
- maintain, protect, and enhance existing landscape features and heritage assets;
- include appropriate planting to screen site infrastructure, such as fencing, substations and buildings;
- erect the minimum of external artificial lighting, and where necessary design lighting to be in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust - Guidance Note GN08/23 Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night; and
- prioritise brownfield land over greenfield sites (and if a greenfield site is selected, justification of site selection process and reasoning of selection should be presented).

iii) Biomass installations in the National Landscape should be at appropriate scales and locations.

iv) Developments for wind energy and associated infrastructure should:

- be generally of smaller scale;

- not take place on prominent hills (within the High Open Moorland and High Volcanic Hills and Slopes landscape types);
- minimise impacts on landscape, nature, heritage, recreation, scenic beauty, and tranquillity; and
- evidence community engagement and local support.

v) Renewable energy developments outside the designated area boundary should take account of the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape.

vi) Renewable energy proposals should be assessed in conjunction with neighbouring local authorities where appropriate.



Plan Recommendations – Climate

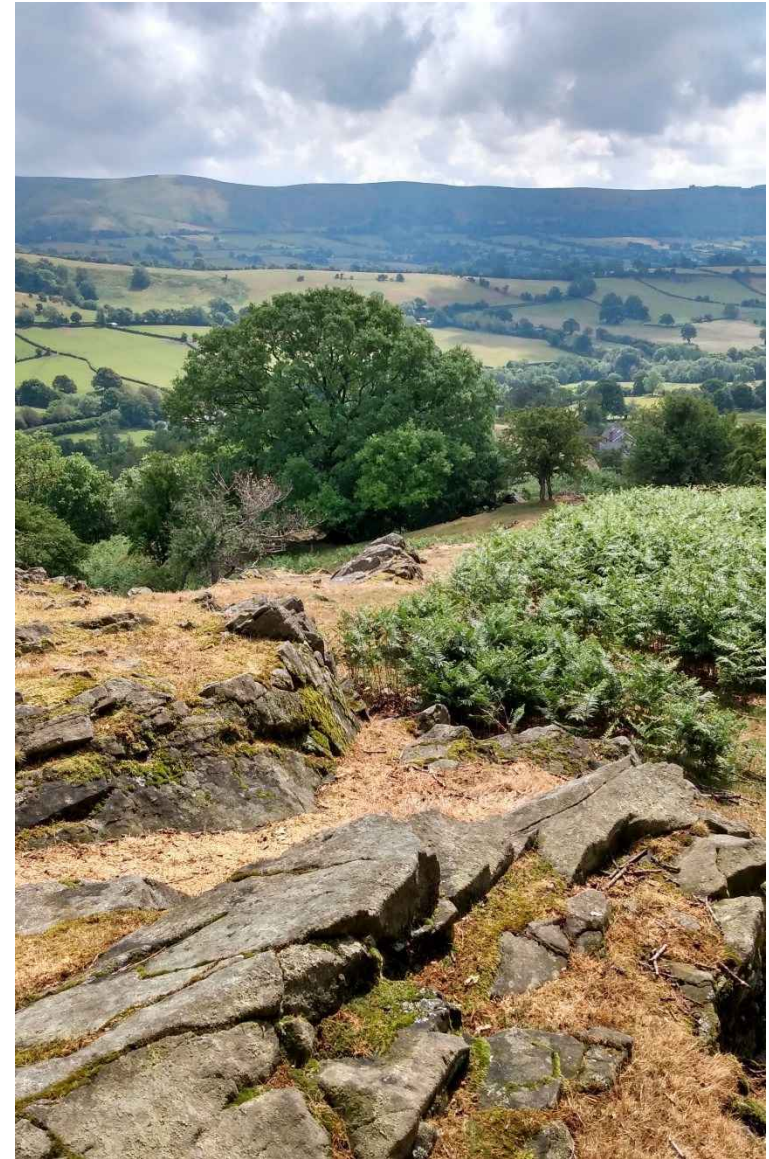
(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

- C 1. Increase the pace and scale of response to climate change.
- C 2. Support mutually reinforcing actions at all levels: e.g. government – business – community – individual.
- C 3. Support dissemination of accurate information and encourage climate conversations at all levels.
- C 4. Encourage behavioural change using understanding from social science, as well as technical solutions.
- C 5. Support action by local/parish level climate groups.
- C 6. Support wide roll-out of [Climate Fresk](#) and Carbon Literacy training.
- C 7. Promote the concept and practices of just transition as part of climate policies to ensure that no-one is unfairly disadvantaged.
- C 8. Undertake more detailed adaptation planning and reporting for the Shropshire Hills, linked to wider local authority work on this.
- C 9. Raise understanding by publishing more case studies on low carbon initiatives and adaptation.
- C 10. Improve resilience of infrastructure to climate impacts where possible, including rights of way, e.g. path drainage, bridges.
- C 11. Encourage further Carbon footprinting on farms and action to reduce emissions and increase carbon storage through farming.
- C 12. Improve local planning policy and guidance on renewables, including a strategy for increasing renewable generation capacity in the county while protecting the National Landscape.
- C 13. Encourage more woodland and trees of appropriate kinds in suitable places (in line with policies and recommendations in the [Nature](#) section of the Plan), and allow hedges to grow to larger volume with hedgerow trees.
- C 14. Set a high aspiration on low carbon travel, applying the transport hierarchy (Avoid – Shift – Improve), seeking to lower car use and encourage active travel – walking, cycling, etc

Plan Aspirations – Climate

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Aspirations are)

- C(a) Connect organisations who are active on climate – to share knowledge and ideas, and promote engagement, communication and collaboration.
- C(b) Explore and promote economic models which work in harmony with climate and natural systems and promote opportunities of a positive low carbon economy.
- C(c) Highlight the health and quality of life benefits of low carbon lifestyles, e.g. more active travel, healthier food, reduced stress.
- C(d) Raise understanding of carbon storage in soils, land and vegetation, and steps to improve sequestration and storage.
- C(e) Expand use of biochar from waste biomass to store carbon and improve soils.
- C(f) Explore wider use of carbon markets, taking into account nature and social implications and ethical considerations.
- C(g) Seek to minimise air travel connected with people visiting the Shropshire Hills, e.g. tourism marketing focused on domestic markets.
- C(h) Integrate Nature-Based Solutions for greenhouse gas emissions with benefits for nature, water management, climate change adaptation, etc.
- C(i) Cease all horticultural use of peat.
- C(j) Highlight good examples of renewable energy generation within protected landscapes.
- C(k) Champion visits to and within the area by public transport, where possible highlighting specific services that facilitate and support this e.g. by providing discount to those arriving not by car.



Extracts from Vision:

Land

is nurtured, so it can sustain us

- Farming produces good food sustainably while supporting nature
- Soils are healthy

Subsections in this 'Land' section of the Plan:

Geology

Soil health

Land use

Farming – transition to new government support regime

Agricultural development and diversification

Sources of practical **guidance**

Forestry and woodlands

Key link to other Plan themes - ***Local food and food systems***

“Anything I do now will probably be for good for nature, you know, and farming at the same time. You mustn’t forget that. It’s got to be farming and nature. It’s got to be in combination.”

Matt Betton, Shropshire Hills farmer



Geology

The Shropshire Hills contain a great variety of geological features from across a very wide range of geological eras or time periods. This has given rise to a diversity of landscapes with hills, crags, scarps and valleys, as well as different building styles, generating the varied character that is so distinctive. The geology that underpins the whole landscape is the basis for understanding the soils, ecology and land use which overlays it.

Due to the robustness of the basic geological resource, earth science conservation is focussed on conserving particular 'exposures' which are significant to the understanding of certain stages, groups or processes. Key geological sites are protected as SSSIs and Locally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (LGS), with the very best listed in the Geological Conservation Review. Some sites are known to be deteriorating through growth of vegetation including trees and scrub, and through scree accumulation masking vertical faces, such as in former quarries.

Some geological sites are used for interpretation and education, and here priority action relates often to the accessibility and visibility of sites. Capacity for maintenance and monitoring is however very limited. Ideally geology needs to be integrated along with other themes.



Soil health

There has been significant activity by farmers through various projects related to soil health and conservation, which can be developed further. Catchment Sensitive Farming has supported this, and other changes in agricultural practice have also had positive impacts. Vulnerability to erosion depends on soil type, slope, aspect and land use, and digital mapping is now a valuable tool. There is now greater understanding of the importance of the soil microbiome, and soil health is a key principle of regenerative farming which is gaining in popularity.

Loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage often supporting pasture are easily compacted when wet, and are prone to capping and slaking, increasing the risks of erosion, especially on steeper slopes. When wet, these soils are easily poached by livestock and compacted by machinery, and the risks of diffuse pollution and flooding are increased. More freely draining, loamy soils typically in arable cultivation are at risk of erosion on slopes where exposed or compacted. The sources of erosion should be tackled, along with slowing pathways and protecting watercourse receptors.



Land use

Finding a balance of land use is one of the most important challenges facing the Shropshire Hills – a balance where farming produces healthy food while sustaining the land and allowing nature recovery and other public benefits. This is not an either/or, and it needs integrated solutions.

This is quite a fast moving policy environment, with recent consultation on the National Land Use Framework and the final Framework expected soon. The Food, Farming & Countryside Commission have undertaken a number of useful county-level land use frameworks. The long term of food security requires the environment which sustains it to be looked after. An integrated approach breaking down silos is likely to help – land uses which are harmful for the environment are often driven by single issue decision-making. Land serves multiple uses and purposes, and some land is more suitable for some functions than others.

A greater diversity of land ownership is gradually happening in the Shropshire Hills, with some sites being bought by Community Land Trusts (especially the Middle Marches CLT). Other new owners of land as individuals or for investment sometimes bring different objectives, which can offer opportunities and occasionally threats to the special qualities or features of the National Landscape.



Farming – transition to new government support regime

The continuation of farming in ways that produces food while being sensitive and sympathetic to the landscape is vital to conserving the qualities that are valued in the National Landscape. Much good work is being done, but there is further to go, to address returns to farmers for nature-friendly business and to reverse declines in biodiversity and the water environment. Working with the natural characteristics and processes of the area offers a sustainable model. We need our farming to be good for people and for nature – providing a supply of good food, respecting and protecting the environment and natural resources, and providing a fair income for farmers.

Farming and land management remains key to the economy of the Shropshire Hills, employing more than a quarter of its residents, and providing a higher proportion of the jobs actually located within the National Landscape. Grass-fed livestock is the main activity, with arable and dairying especially in the lower lying fringes of the area. Food production will remain an important objective in the Shropshire Hills, but the many other public benefits from land management also need to influence how this is carried out. The long-term capacity to continue producing food depends on looking after natural capital (such as soils, clean water and pollinators) as well as social capital (e.g. by promoting farm support networks, encouraging succession, and retaining and developing skills).

The transition for upland farming is a key issue for the area, and solutions enabling farm businesses to be environmentally, economically and socially sustainable are supported.



Much of the Shropshire Hills is used for raising grass-fed livestock which is relatively low intensity farming, but some of the land is worked quite hard and has become ecologically simplified. There

are directions within the industry towards regenerative and agroecological farming, and lower input grazing systems where reducing stocking rates can increase profitability by reducing costs. These approaches could be very beneficial to nature recovery.

The benefits to nature from farming can come not just from looking after habitats at the fringes – the fields themselves matter too. This is recognised in High Nature Value (HNV) farming where relatively low-intensity farming systems maintain large areas of semi-natural habitat in high quality countryside. Apart from conserving wildlife, these types of farming provide ecosystem services such as carbon storage, clean water and fire prevention, and much of the rich social fabric and character of landscape.

Maintaining these kinds of farming system and preventing abandonment or wholesale intensification is therefore a priority. The social and economic realities of farming systems are important to conservation strategies. Across the larger areas outside nature reserves, conservation of semi-natural habitats is more likely to be effective and meaningful if embedded in the cultural and socio-economic activity of the communities which created them and now maintains them.



Case study – Upper Onny Farmers Group

The Upper Onny Farmers Group was formed in 2018 initially with 8 farmers, now 32 members. The group has the aim to *'share views about the main issues affecting the future of farming and the environment in the upper Onny valley, and to explore ways for improving the environment, the landscape and its wildlife in ways that are integral to profitable farm businesses'*. It has been supported in its development over several years by staff from the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team and the National Trust, the latter providing significant funding for staff time by both organisations, as part of the Stepping Stones project. The Group has recently formed as an independent organisation.



Members of the Upper Onny Farmers group on a visit to Cumbria

Case study - Clee View Farmers Group

With 3 years of support from the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund a significant group of over 60 farmers has formed on the Clee Hills, covering over 15,000ha. A wide variety of events have been organised including on herbal leys, soils, carbon accounting, water, and natural capital assessment.

Agricultural development and diversification

Diversification activities involving new development should work with the qualities of the National Landscape rather than against them, and respect the quality of the landscape, which is the basis also of many other businesses in the area. If the designation is perceived as a limitation to a certain kind of development, this is an indication that the development is not adopting an approach working in harmony with the high quality landscape. Many types of developments of farm enterprises and diversification can be done without harm to the National Landscape, including:

- Adding value to agricultural products
- Alternative livestock
- Sustainable tourism, including accommodation and sensitively planned events
- Care farming and social forestry
- Crafts and training
- Woodlands and agro-forestry
- Alternative uses of buildings

A simple Sustainability checklist for diversification would include looking at:

- Where possible using previously developed land and re-using existing buildings.
- Using locally sourced materials and minimising waste.
- High quality and sustainable design and construction methods.
- Energy efficiency, renewable energy and recycling.
- Minimising the need for travel and transport.
- Protecting and enhancing landscape, heritage and biodiversity.

Sources of practical guidance

Shropshire Hills National Landscape website. Includes: Conservation and Land Management – Water Friendly Farming, Planting and Caring for Trees, Black Poplar management, alder coppicing, conserving curlews, hedgerow birds, lapwings. Good practice guide to geological conservation.
<https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/help-to-look-after/resources/guidance-and-grants#wood>

Farm Wildlife is a partnership of 8 leading wildlife organisations, brought together to provide a single source of best-practice management advice for wildlife on farmland.
<https://farmwildlife.info/>

Practical Guidance for Farmers – **Natural Flood Management** – Catchment Based Approach

Upland Farmer Toolkit <https://uplandfarmertoolkit.org.uk/>

Nature Friendly Farming Network <https://www.nffn.org.uk/>

Linking Environment & Farming (LEAF) <https://leaf.eco/>

Farming Advice Service (Defra funded)
<https://www.farmingadvice.service.org.uk/>

Catchment Sensitive Farming
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/catchment-sensitive-farming-reduce-agricultural-water-pollution>

Regenerative Food & Farming CIC
<https://regenerativefoodandfarming.co.uk/>

Forestry and woodlands

Woodlands and trees are important features in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and are recognised as one of the special qualities of the area. The area has higher than the national average of woodland overall (13%) and of ancient and semi-natural woodland. 4.95% of the area is covered by ancient woodlands but approximately two thirds of that area are sites classed as Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

The Shropshire Hills are important for commercial forestry due to their position geographically and the suitability of the land. While conifers clearly have an ongoing role for timber and biomass, more could be done to encourage and support the restoration and development of management skills, supply chains, and markets for hardwood timber. Commercial forests are owned both by Forestry England and private estates. Policy and grants have for some time encouraged multi-purpose forestry for conservation and recreation benefits as well as timber production, supporting greater diversity with more broadleaved trees and open space. Forestry and woodland creation along with management of existing woodland offers valuable opportunities to farmers and landowners to diversify their businesses. Steep slopes and access for machinery to manage these woodlands can be a constraint and well-designed access tracks are needed.



Key link to other Plan themes - Local food and food systems

There can be a positive link between changes to the food system and landscape. The Food, Farming & Countryside Commission sees the synergy between farming for healthier diets in people and for a healthier environment, with a more mixed farming system with greater crop diversity and more biodiverse and permanent grasslands, grazed by native ruminants. This could deliver more sustainable/regenerative land use, improving health, tackling climate change etc, all at once. More sustainable and healthier diets would include eating in season, eating lots of plants, less but better quality meat, home growing, less processed foods, and more whole foods. People's behaviour as consumers can help drive these changes but changes are needed in supply chains and the food system also. Shropshire Good Food Partnership is working on all these things locally with partners.

The affordability of local food remains a core factor where cost of living issues are systemically embedded within many communities in the National Landscape. Public understanding of the many different food accreditations is also an issue. Scalability, supply reliability, diversity of consumer choice and investment in local food chains within the National Landscape are relatively underdeveloped. In the Shropshire Hills a small number of meat producers sell direct, either from the farm, by mail order or through Farmers' Markets. Availability of local abattoirs is a barrier for local meat supply. The Pasture for Life group has been undertaking a project locally and nationally with FiPL funding.

In more fertile and sheltered valleys there are some vegetable growers. There are some speciality products such as cheeses, organic milk, ice cream and gin. Beer, cider and juices are a feature of the area with a number of local breweries and orchards. Outlets for local food include markets, farm shops and venues such as restaurants, cafes, shops. There are also some events such as the Slow Food Festival at The Bridges, and the now annual Shropshire Good Food Trail. Some regenerative farms do public events and engagement.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties - Land (not exhaustive)

(many of the statutory requirements highlighted in other topics also relate to land, especially those in Nature and Water)

Rules for farmers and land managers - what you must do when you keep livestock or manage land.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Hedgerow regulations

Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) regulations



PLAN POLICIES – LAND

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

13. Geology and Soils

- i) Sites of geological and geodiversity importance should be protected, and actively managed and enhanced where necessary.**
- ii) Soils should be protected, and soil degradation reversed by minimising erosion and compaction and increasing organic content.**
- iii) The sustainable management of soils should be a priority, to increase their overall health and to support nature recovery, natural water management, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and long-term productivity of land.**

14. Land use

- i) An optimum balance of land use should be sought to deliver the best overall long-term benefits to society.**
- ii) The multi-functional benefits of land should be optimised.**

15. Farming

- i) Farmers should be supported to continue growing food through profitable enterprises, in ways which are sympathetic to nature, climate, water, heritage and landscape. Farming and land management practices should as far as possible be sympathetic to the purpose of the National Landscape and priorities of the Plan.**
- ii) The best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected from development.**
- iii) The Environmental Land Management scheme and other relevant government funding schemes should deliver Management Plan priorities as far as possible.**
- iv) Opportunities to develop and promote local food supply chains should be supported, and to increase local food resilience,**

opportunities to expand sustainable horticulture and vegetable production should be supported where possible.

16. Agricultural development

i) Agricultural and diversification development regulated through the planning system should be in keeping with the special qualities of the National Landscape.

ii) New farm buildings should be of high design standards in keeping with the special qualities of the National Landscape and take account of published Agricultural Buildings guidance. The minimum of external artificial lighting should be erected, and where necessary, design lighting to be in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust - Guidance Note GN08/23 Bats and Artificial Lighting At Night;

iii) Major development for intensive livestock including poultry should only be allowed where the stringent tests of exceptional circumstances in national policy are met. Criteria indicating that applications for intensive livestock developments should be refused include where:

- the scale of new buildings would exceed the farmstead's existing built footprint;
- proximity to other developments would create significant cumulative adverse impacts;
- development is proposed in open field locations away from other farm buildings;
- significant earth-moving or bunding is proposed, or landscape features landscape features such as hedgerows, watercourses, trees, and ponds are affected;
- the topography means that the development will be easily visible from publicly accessible vantage points;
- harm to local amenity and landscape character cannot be satisfactorily mitigated;

- proximity to residential properties or other businesses (within 400m has potential to generate harmful impacts on amenity, as recognised in the restriction in this zone for agricultural permitted development);
- units would be accessed by narrow roads and/or heavy traffic movements would alter the character of rural lanes or damage hedges or verges.

iv) Development of dwellings for rural workers should be allowed where:

- the proposal can demonstrate an essential need for permanent accommodation at or near a place of work;
- no significant adverse impacts upon the local community, landscape, nature, heritage, natural beauty, and tranquillity can be demonstrated.

17. Forestry

i) The optimum delivery of nature and public benefits from commercial forestry is encouraged.



Recommendations – Land

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

- L 1. Continue the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme (this is a Defra decision) and a land management advice function in the National Landscape Team.
- L 2. Raise awareness of and champion agro-ecological and regenerative farming methods with a focus on soil health, and facilitate knowledge exchange for new sustainable farming methods.
- L 3. Continue to adapt to rapidly evolving government policy for land and farming.
- L 4. Support the development of farmer groups and clusters – including new and existing groups, linking and sharing experience.
- L 5. Continue to make the case for extensive grazing of livestock as a sustainable use of hill land.
- L 6. Support the special role of common land to deliver multiple benefits, and the continuation of common grazing and commoners associations.
- L 7. Raise awareness of geology as the foundation of our landscape and of how knowledge of rocks helps to understand soil – its pH, hydrology, etc, and what kinds of habitats would naturally develop, to inform land management decisions.
- L 8. Support a ‘nature positive’ and ‘carbon negative’ food system, and local food initiatives – e.g. networking producers with outlets, developing short supply chains, marketing which draws on the special qualities of the area and the quality of production.
- L 9. Seek to ensure an adequate and co-ordinated provision of farm advisers across all relevant topics, co-ordinated among a variety of providers.
- L 10. Support the provision of training and skills relevant to agricultural transition (e.g. habitat creation, carbon footprinting) as well as traditional skills (e.g. hedge laying, drystone walling).

Aspirations - Land

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Aspirations are)

- L(a) Secure DEFRA Landscape Recovery programme funding for appropriate areas of the Shropshire Hills.
- L(b) Foster ongoing constructive dialogue between farmers and other stakeholders to build common ground and reduce polarisation.
- L(c) Explore Maximum Sustainable Output approaches for farming, looking to lower inputs while maintaining or improving profitability.
- L(d) Explore local application of principles of the new Land Use Framework to influence local land use decisions.
- L(e) Apply holistic deer management strategies to enable woodland regeneration, and support this by building local venison supply chains.
- L(f) Support local provision of Community Supported Agriculture, where customers build a link with a producer through subscription, and through events and volunteering.
- L(g) Expand markets for a variety of woodland products to support sustainable woodland management.
- L(h) Support husbandry techniques to reduce methane emissions from livestock.
- L(i) Manage a priority suite of geological sites to a high standard with access and interpretation.
- L(j) Foster a local food culture, promoting local food and drink to visitors and through suppliers, retailers, and hospitality businesses.
- L(k) Develop a regular competition for a Shropshire Hills Local Food Hero – to reward and profile as a personal story in order to raise awareness of local food activity.

Extracts from Vision:

Water

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life

- Streams and rivers are naturalised and healthy, from headwaters to floodplains
- Water resources are managed carefully

Subsections in this 'Water' section of the Plan:

Integrated catchment management

Water quality

Flood attenuation, and managing low flows

Catchment **headwaters**

Water as a **resource**

Key link to other Plan themes - ***Managing land in order to look after water***

*"In the valleys of spring of rivers
By Ony and Teme and Clun,
The country for easy livers
The quietest under the sun..."*

Extracts from 'A Shropshire Lad' by A E Housman, 1896.



Integrated catchment management

A catchment is the area of land, often bounded by high ground, which drains into a given river and its tributaries, eventually joining a larger river or flowing out to the sea. The Shropshire Hills forms the majority of the headwaters of the Teme catchment, and it is helpful to think of it as this. Administrative units focus attention within a county boundary, but the way land and water are managed in the Shropshire Hills affects water flows beyond Shropshire, such as at Tenbury Wells and Worcester.



Integrated catchment management is about treating a river catchment as a system, looking at flood risk, water quality and other ecosystem functions together and engaging relevant stakeholders. The government supports this through the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) and in our area there is the Teme Catchment Partnership, which is led by Severn Rivers Trust. Sub-catchments can also be a useful scale to work at, and in our area the Clun Catchment is the obvious example.

The Vision for the Teme Catchment is for:

"Healthy functioning rivers flowing through a balanced living landscape, cherished by all in the Teme Catchment."

High level objectives for the Teme Catchment include:

- Water bodies with high ecological status and natural ecological function.
- A healthy and recruiting population of Freshwater pearl mussels.
- Wildlife returning to the river and the catchment, including rare fish, such as shad and formerly common birds such as cuckoo.
- Healthy and connected trees and woodlands.
- River sediment reduced to natural levels through improved practices, such as sustainable urban and rural drainage and good buffer strips along river banks on cultivated land and fewer livestock accessing the river.
- Sustainable levels of water in the streams and rivers.
- No need for pesticide removal from drinking water.

Northern parts of the National Landscape drain north into the Middle Severn especially via the Cound Brook, ending up also in the River Severn below the Teme confluence.

A small area in the north-west of the Shropshire Hills drains into the Upper Severn and falls within the area of the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme which is seeking to implement catchment management solutions to reduce flooding in Shrewsbury especially. This sits as part of the broader River Severn Partnership working for a sustainable future for the whole Severn catchment.

Catchments in the Shropshire Hills include valuable standing water – ponds and small lakes, as well as rivers and their tributaries. An integrated catchment approach recognises the connections of all these.

Water quality

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations 2017 put the EU Water Framework Directive into UK law post Brexit. The regulations require that a river basin management plan is prepared for each river basin district, ours being the Severn.

In a national context water quality in the Shropshire Hills is quite good, but it is not as good as it should be, and in many places has deteriorated. In 2024 figures, 0% of river length in the Shropshire Hills had 'high' ecological status, 3.7% had 'good' ecological status, 81% had 'moderate' status and 15% had 'poor' status. While the overall trend appears to be one of deterioration, the earlier data are not directly comparable so the amount of change is not entirely clear.

There are a range of factors affecting water quality in the area, but diffuse pollution from agricultural sources remains a significant one. The River Clun Special Area of Conservation with its population of freshwater pearl mussel rightly takes the most attention in the area, but the issues around water quality and influences on it are also applicable to other sub-catchments in the Shropshire Hills.



River Clun

In March 2022 Natural England published updated guidance on water quality and nutrient neutrality advice (NE785) which was based on the River Clun SAC being classified as in 'unfavourable condition' due to the continued depletion of the freshwater pearl mussel population as a result of declining water quality. As a result, Shropshire Council are not able to grant planning permission for new developments that provide overnight accommodation within the catchment of the River Clun SAC, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact in terms of nutrient loading to the designated protected area.

Freshwater pearl mussels are very sensitive to water quality, with juvenile mussels being particularly susceptible to pollution. The River Clun SAC is in unfavourable and declining condition caused by high levels of phosphate, nitrogen and silt. Agricultural activities give rise to all three of these, whilst development mostly contributes phosphates from surface and foul water discharges. The phosphate levels required by the freshwater pearl mussel are extremely low and they are already too high for the pearl mussels to breed and also too high to maintain adult pearl mussels. Therefore, any additional phosphate entering the river will make the condition of the special area of conservation worse.

A joint statement by the Environment Agency, Natural England, Shropshire Council and Severn Trent Water of 2021 states that whilst the favourable conservation targets recognise the unique environmental value of the River Clun SAC, there is also the need to recognise the value of the area as an important rural community.

"Our combined vision for the River Clun SAC is therefore for the whole catchment area to be restored to a functional unit where a nature recovery plan enables ecological and human needs to successfully interact, thereby balancing the needs of people, economy and the environment."

The Clun Protected Site Strategy (PSS) is currently still in its pilot research and development phase. A Diffuse Water Pollution Plan for the Clun has also been recently prepared.

Flood attenuation, and managing low flows

Flooding is of two types - surface water flooding caused by water that is on a journey *towards* the river channel, and river flooding that is caused by excess water *spilling out of* a river channel. Available modelling including online public tools indicate that there is a low risk of river and surface flooding within the National Landscape except by the River Severn, and along the banks of the River Clun and its tributaries. However, damaging localised surface and river water floods are being seen increasingly often due to extreme weather events. There is a need to plan pro-actively, but a concern that the national modelling may underestimate the risks in our area. Such modelling also has the challenge of trying to take account of climate change predictions, which show that rainfall events will increase in their frequency and intensity, posing greater threat of flash flooding to communities.



Surface water flooding affects roads and paths as well as properties

There is a greater understanding now that holding water higher in a catchment for longer 'slowing the flow' helps to reduce or attenuate flood risk downstream, since so many catchment

streams come together. There is however still misunderstanding about flooding, and some attempts to reduce flooding by removing obstacles and speeding up flow simply exacerbate flooding downstream. The strategy can be summarised as "Slow it, sink it, spread it."

Re-naturalising and 're-wiggling' rivers to more natural form is a way to slow the flow further down the course of a river as well as having habitat benefits. Low flows also affect rivers in the area, especially the River Teme which has suffered from drying periods with significant impacts on fish and wildlife. They also affect the River Redlake and the Clun. Holding water back for longer high in a catchment also helps to recharge groundwater levels, which then maintain base flows for rivers and reduce the risk of drying.



The River Teme drying up in a drought year (Environment Agency)

The interaction with heritage features and assets of action to slow flows needs to be considered e.g. ditches are sometimes of historical significance or protected. Compromise solutions can often be found.

Catchment headwaters

Headwaters are the tributaries feeding a river system, defined as the first 2.5km of streams from their source. Due to the very high number of branching small channels, these can make up 70% of total river length. They are the essential ecological foundation for healthy functioning river systems, a habitat in their own right and the support system for downstream rivers. Hydrologically they are the 'gathering grounds' for river flow and are crucial in controlling water supply (quality and quantity) and flood risk management.



Approximate extent of headwater areas in orange

The degree of naturalness or modification of land at stream sources makes a big difference to the river catchment. In the Shropshire Hills, headwaters are often highly modified - by drainage, simplified vegetation and in some cases culverting. The aim should be to restore natural headwater function and mosaics of in-channel, riparian and wetland habitats. Restoration of natural processes include natural flow, geomorphology and water quality regimes. This requires a large-scale perspective, looking at the land areas at catchment headwaters and not just the stream or riparian area.

Case study - Soil and hydrology surveying in the River Clun headwaters to inform work to re-naturalise hydrology

During 2023-25 detailed eco-hydrology survey work was done on 900ha of land where shallow peat was thought to be present, including farmland, forestry and nature reserves. The survey has made recommendations for enhancing environmental benefits by re-naturalising hydrology in the headwaters. The importance of high-functioning natural processes in headwater areas is key in climate change resilience. These soils, rich in organic matter and in places peaty, are important for water regulation as well as storing carbon and maintaining water quality. Hydrology in the Clun catchment is quite highly modified. Gaining detailed site-specific information about hydrology and habitats is seen as key to informing and encouraging land management centred on restoring natural hydrology.

The aim was to understand the condition and extent of shallow peaty soils and the current hydrology to inform future management, including:

- Peat soil survey (presence, depth, condition & extent)
- Vegetation surveys to understand plant communities and links between peaty soils, vegetation diversity and roughness, and hydrology.
- Eco-hydrology surveys to identify natural and human influences on water movement (surface water flows, ground water and streams)

<https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/our-work/projects/clun-headwaters>



Looking at shallow peat at Rhos Fiddle SWT nature reserve

Water as a resource

Water is used directly from watercourses and water bodies by farm livestock, through abstraction (pumping from streams and rivers), and treated mains water is used by farms, homes and businesses.

The water 'footprint' of different activities is increasingly understood to be important to consider and seek to minimise.

Rainwater capture and storage systems for farming have potential to reduce pressure on water resources at key times, as well as increasing the resilience of the farm business. Depending on the farm, use can also be made of natural storage with benefits to wildlife.



Solar powered pump for livestock watering funded by a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant

Key link to other Plan themes - Managing land in order to look after water

The land and water systems are integrally linked, and many of the measures to manage water quality and quantity are taken on land.

Water friendly farming techniques for water quality are set out in the Teme Rivers Water Friendly Farming Guide, including livestock managements, ditches, woody debris, run-off and erosion.

Natural Flood Management measures on land include:

- Buffer strips along watercourses
- Peat restoration
- Soil management
- Tree planting, especially contour woodlands/hedges
- Passive floodplain storage
- Formal flood store areas
- Taller and more complex vegetation



New hedge with ditch reprofiled as a swale which will slow the flow over time

Beavers have been proven to have very beneficial effects on naturalising hydrology as well as improving habitats. They are a keystone species and their dams help to store water and slow the flow, with beneficial effects in lowering flood peaks. Species reintroduction needs to be done with great care and appropriate consultation, but the first beavers have arrived in the Shropshire Hills and could have an increased role to play in future.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties - Water (not exhaustive)

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations 2017 – ecological and chemical status of rivers

Environment Act water targets

Farming rules for water

Nutrient neutrality

Pollution laws in Water Resources Act 1991

Consent regimes for alterations to watercourses



PLAN POLICIES – WATER

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

18. Water Quality

i) All feasible steps should be taken to improve the condition of the River Clun SAC and the River Teme SSSI.

ii) Land use and land management should avoid adverse impacts on the quality of watercourses, waterbodies, and natural water systems. Water-friendly farming techniques should be encouraged to reduce diffuse pollution and soil loss to rivers.

iii) Development should avoid harm to water quality, including chemical pollution, nutrient pollution and sedimentation, and including through cumulative effects.

iv) Highways management and drainage should seek to minimise movement of sediment into watercourses, by careful management of road verges and use of sediment traps and swales, etc. where appropriate.

v) Sewage and wastewater treatment should be of a high standard to have no adverse impacts on river water quality.

vi) Septic tanks should be maintained to high standards to avoid harm to water quality.

vii) Impacts on water quality and nutrient levels from intensive pheasant rearing and duck shooting should be minimised.

19. Flood attenuation, and managing low flows

i) Natural Flood Management measures should be used to increase water storage, reduce flood risks, maintain aquifers and to help prevent low flows and drying of rivers.

ii) Development should support and enable the natural storage of water through sustainable drainage systems.

iii) Drainage and water management measures should avoid displacing flooding, and should look to water storage solutions where possible rather than speeding up flows.

iv) Natural water storage should be enhanced e.g. through restoration and creation of ponds and other small waterbodies.

20. Water as a resource

i) Harm should be avoided to water resources, by protecting rivers, wetlands and water environment. Regulation should be used where needed to protect water resources and the water environment.

ii) Water resources should be managed to be sustainable and more resilient to pressures from climate change.

iii) On-farm storage of water is encouraged, to help reduce demand on river and stream water supplies.

21. Managing land to look after water

i) Naturalness of watercourses and floodplains should be enhanced and restored, and river and riverbank habitats improved. Artificial in-channel obstructions limiting the natural range of fish should be removed where possible.

ii) Land use and land management in upland areas should support retaining water for longer in catchment headwaters.

iii) Methods should be adopted to avoid as far as possible soil compaction which reduces infiltration and accelerates run-off.

iv) Nature-based solutions should integrate water measures with nature recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation.



Leaky barrier to slow the flow in a small stream

Recommendations – Water

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

- W 1. Deliver improvements to the condition of the River Clun SAC through activity linked to the Protected Site Strategy pilot.
- W 2. Take necessary steps for all rivers in the National Landscape to reach good ecological and chemical status.
- W 3. Strengthen co-ordination and avoid siloing water issues, by adopting a holistic approach.
- W 4. Focus on headwaters and upper catchments as a key significance of the Shropshire Hills area.
- W 5. Seek opportunities for rewetting, especially of deep peatland, valley mires and high organic matter soils in the headwaters.
- W 6. Support landowners to implement recommended actions from recent Upper Clun surveys to re-naturalise hydrology.
- W 7. Continue and promote Catchment Sensitive Farming scheme providing advice and grants for farmers for works to help improve water quality.
- W 8. Promote working and thinking at catchment and sub-catchment scales as functional units.
- W 9. Support the further reintroduction of beavers in selected and controlled suitable sites.
- W 10. Undertake re-meandering or re-wiggling of rivers at suitable sites to restore more natural form and habitats.
- W 11. Support greater public engagement and understanding about rivers and the water environment, including iconic species such as salmon, otter and water vole, and steps that individuals can take.
- W 12. Promote existing legal public access to rivers, and seek opportunities to extend access, such as through agreements.
- W 13. Encourage safe and sustainable use of water for recreation, including paddling and wild swimming.

Aspirations - Water

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Aspirations are)

- W(a) Establish a major project or area initiative for the Teme headwaters focusing on re-naturalising hydrology of headwater areas.
- W(b) Widespread adoption of water-friendly farming techniques.
- W(c) Undertake further hydrology surveys where appropriate.
- W(d) Use of soil erosion risk mapping to inform land management to avoid siltation in rivers.
- W(e) Raise awareness of human health importance of water quality.
- W(f) Strengthen fish populations.
- W(g) Support citizen science involvement in water and river health.



Extracts from Vision:

People

are healthy and connected to nature –
in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

- People have sufficient income, housing and services
- All parts of society can enjoy natural beauty

Subsections in this 'People' section of the Plan:

Meeting the **needs of residents** – income, housing, access to services

Access and recreation – walking, cycling, other activities

Health and wellbeing

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – young people and other underserved communities

Public engagement and communications, interpretation

Education, learning, skills and training

Volunteering and involvement, fund-raising

Key link to other Plan themes - ***Visitor management and environmental sensitivity***

*"Have you ever beheld freedom through these eyes?
These tall hills sitting right beneath the skies
A painful path is gonna teach you how to fly
In the dirt I think I saw a butterfly."*

Nature's Anthem, Still Shadey (Nature Calling arts project)



Meeting the needs of residents – income, housing, access to services

These topics lie beyond the direct scope of National Landscape purposes, but are a vital part of the context of the area, and so to any environmental work. These aspects are represented in the 'social foundation' inner ring of the Doughnut model used as a framework for this Plan. Through our Doughnut data portrait process, the top social challenges in the Shropshire Hills area were identified as housing, social equity, income and work, and access to services.



Though affordable housing is a particular priority, it is recognised that there is also a need for some market housing to meet local needs.

Communities in the Shropshire Hills face considerably higher levels of deprivation than the England average for rural areas, with 67% of the population falling within the five most deprived deciles in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (compared to 28% for rural areas in England).

Other challenges relating to access to services facing rural communities and businesses in the Shropshire Hills include:

- Transport – not necessarily 'connectivity', but cost and availability
- Broadband and mobile phone coverage, though these have improved
- Delivery of health and social services in sparse rural areas

Access and recreation – walking, cycling, other activities

Enjoyment of the landscape in many forms is a key public benefit from the Shropshire Hills and their designation as a National Landscape.

Walking is the most popular activity, enjoyed by a high proportion of visitors.

Many forms of countryside recreation are increasing, and patterns of use continue to change and evolve. New recreational users of the countryside often have a high reliance on poor quality digital mapping and low awareness of access rights and responsibilities, which can exacerbate visitor management issues.

The area has greater potential for cycling touring and both road and off-road cycling. The Shropshire Way is a valuable resource with potential to attract more people for multi-day walking holidays using local accommodation.

Physical pressure from numbers of visitors can be seen at well-used sites such as at the Long Mynd, the Wrekin and some other hills.



Path widening due to heavy use near the Wrekin summit

Health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature and outdoor exercise are well documented, including physical and mental health. On the other hand, there are increasing levels of obesity, and a widening divide in society between those who are physically active and those who aren't.

At a deeper level of connection, practical volunteering brings along with physical exercise the additional benefits of building sense of purpose and belonging to a place and often also of social connections.

The Shropshire Hills are visited by several million people a year and offer an accessible 'natural health service'. Health sector funding has been accessed in the past for countryside volunteering activities in Shropshire, but this has declined in recent years. The case for this kind of upstream, preventative investment remains strong however.



Equity, Diversity & Inclusion – including young people and other underserved communities

In March 2023 the National Landscape team commissioned a study on improving engagement with underserved groups in the Shropshire Hills. The recommendation themes in the report were:

1. Communicating confidently about diversity and inclusion
2. Maximising the health and wellbeing potential of the landscape
3. Increasing diversity in participation
4. Improving accessibility
5. Developing creative connections to nearby urban areas
6. Strengthening commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion
7. Aligning strategy and action with national policy and best practice

Engaging with some 'hard to reach' groups in society is usually labour intensive and requires particular techniques such as outreach activities.

The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre can play an even stronger role in enthusing people about climate action, nature recovery, cultural heritage, sustainable tourism and local regeneration, as a gateway to the Shropshire Hills.



Farm visit in the Shropshire Hills through Generation Green 2, a national project for young people

Case study - Young Rangers

From 2021-2023 the National Landscape team had project funding from our National Lottery and employed a new officer in our team three days per week specifically to run the Young Rangers. South Shropshire Youth Forum were also contracted to run a second group. Each group had an activity roughly every two weeks.



"I have learnt teamwork. I'm more brave and confident than I was. I'm more open and have joined in more activities. I've taken the lead in some of them and I feel myself and I can make new friends."

"Young Rangers has been fantastic for our son who is dyslexic and struggles sometimes at school. He also struggles a bit with social interactions so it's good practice to interact with other young people in a safe and caring environment". [Parent]

An informal consultation session with a Young Rangers group in August 2025 introduced the Doughnut model and asked young people what might be missing from this Plan that was important to them and they could help us understand. The main point they made was the **need to make more opportunities available and accessible for young people to get outdoors and connect with nature**. They recognised the barriers that exist for young people to get outside, but also how valuable this was for their mental health, especially to counteract the addictive patterns of use of online technology.

Case study - outreach work by Shropshire Hills Engagement Ranger

Through the new Engagement Ranger post, the National Landscape team worked in 2024 with new audiences including those with sight loss, Parkinson's disease and refugees. 20 organised events involved a total of 185 attendees. Insights from this were added to through our involvement in a EUROPARC study visit in 2024 on social inclusion in tourism. Lessons learned included:

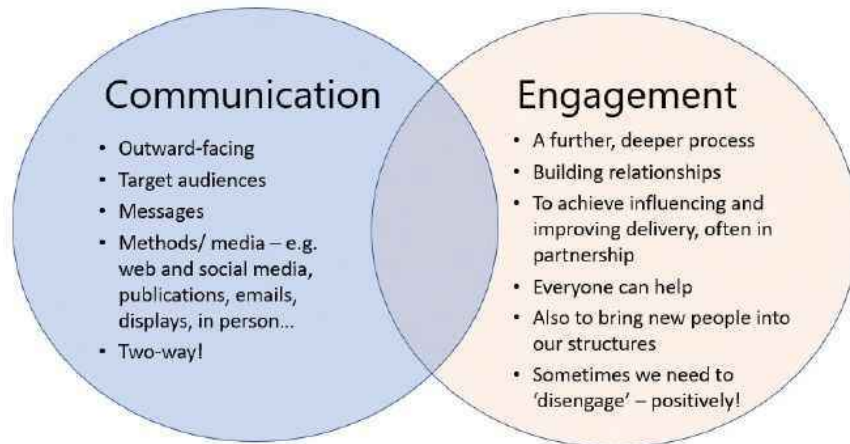
- People face different and sometimes intersecting barriers, including money, knowledge, confidence and social norms.
- A 'pathway' or gradual progression through local visits might be useful for people for whom the barriers are significant.
- Initiatives which help people to connect to greenspace close to where they live are likely to help people to develop confidence and interest, which may encourage them to participate more.
- Outdoor and environmental education programmes for children are a valuable way to give opportunities to underserved groups, including day visits and residential. These may lead to children encouraging their parents to make trips to the countryside.
- Even relatively low cost opportunities for visits may exclude some people, due to cost, access to a car or outdoor equipment.



Visit to the Stiperstones by a Sight Loss group from Telford

Public engagement and communications, interpretation

Communication and engagement are seen as complementary and overlapping activities – engagement being more ongoing and done more through direct personal contact:



The National Landscape Team has a Communications and Engagement Strategy which is being reviewed in light of this Plan. There is a balance to strike between focusing limited resources on engaging 'high influence' stakeholders for maximum impact, and reaching new audiences in the general public. Both have a place.

Interpretation is used to invite people to explore, appreciate, enjoy and respect the special qualities of the National Landscape. All interventions should be carefully planned to ensure only the most appropriate and accessible approaches are used, for the right audiences, in the right locations and at the right times. Ideally, relevant people should be involved from the outset in communicating the significance of these places and the nature, stories, events, and objects that make them special. Media used may be digital, fixed, visual, audio, tactile, spoken, written, carved, crafted, performed, played, and demonstrated means to most effectively convey what makes the Shropshire Hills a special place.

Education, learning, skills and training

Education and learning can connect with and benefit the National Landscape at all levels. For formal education, the Shropshire Hills is a great resource. There are primary schools within the National Landscape and Secondary Schools in the towns around. There are further and higher education colleges which have courses in a range of relevant subjects. Local universities include Harper Adams, Chester and Birmingham. Cardingmill Valley and the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre are particularly important venues for school visits and outdoor learning.

Adult learning happens through a wide variety of providers. Practical skills include those for nature conservation, heritage such as traditional buildings, and land management. More could be done on career training and pathways in to working in conservation or the land management sector.



Photo from a Generation Green 2 event in the Shropshire Hills

Volunteering and involvement, including fundraising

Active volunteering brings benefits to the landscape and to people. A number of organisations support practical volunteer activity in the Shropshire Hills, including the National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Restoring Shropshire's Verges project. Volunteers are also involved in looking after heritage sites and biological recording. Organisations such as the Middle Marches Community Land Trust provide valuable learning and networking opportunities for voluntary groups through their conferences.



There can be a cross-over of involvement and support to more active donation and fundraising. The Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust is a good vehicle for this as a registered charity, but other organisations also fundraise for activities which contribute to the Management Plan.

There is a need to help communities and businesses within and around the National Landscape identify and celebrate being part of a nationally recognised landscape.

Key link to other Plan themes - Visitor management and environmental sensitivity

In our landscape, some of the most visited sites are hills which are also amongst our most important conservation sites. Physical pressure from numbers of visitors can be seen at well-used sites such as at the Long Mynd, the Wrekin and some other hills. There are also some disturbance impacts to wildlife from people and dogs, and localised adverse impacts from recreational off-road vehicle use. Negative impacts of tourism on natural and cultural resources are not as severe as in some more heavily visited places, but the resources available here to manage these problems are also quite limited.

A set of strategies for managing visitors and encouraging environmental sensitivity which were developed in the post-Covid peaks of visitor numbers have ongoing relevance:

- **Good public information to prevent problems at source**
Using key on-line platforms and sites, alignment of messages, listing of sites and locations
- **Managing popular sites and encouraging dispersal**
Better public information about parking places
- **Encouraging responsible visitor behaviour**
Using lessons from behavioural science – positive messages, connecting with people's motivations
- **Monitoring and understanding visitor use**
Lessons from visitor surveys and further data collection
- **Support for businesses, farmers and communities impacted by visitor pressure**
Co-ordinated messaging, ideally a troubleshooting capacity
- **In the longer term, develop and improve visitor infrastructure**
Walking and cycling routes, small scale parking, sites with facilities.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties - People (not exhaustive)

Statutory levels of service for local authorities

Housing targets

Public rights of way – guide for farmers and landowners

Rights of Way – Council responsibilities

Rights of Way – responsibilities of users



PLAN POLICIES – PEOPLE

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

22. Housing

- i) Development of affordable housing to meet local needs should be prioritised to increase the sustainability of communities within the National Landscape.
- ii) Development of affordable housing within the National Landscape should be supported where:
 - development design is of high design quality, and has regard for local and traditional vernacular styles;
 - density of development is sympathetic to existing housing density within the local area; and
 - no significant adverse impacts upon the local community, landscape, nature, heritage, natural beauty, and tranquillity can be demonstrated.

23. Employment

- i) Opportunities for local employment in activities which are sympathetic to the special qualities of the National Landscape should be supported and encouraged. Creation of jobs in activities which are harmful to the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape should not be used to justify harmful developments.

24. Services

- i) Priority should be given to maintaining and enhancing local community services and amenities and improving access to these.
- ii) Rural services should be delivered in sustainable ways, make the most of health and wellbeing opportunities from the landscape,

and as far as possible support the purpose of designation and the priorities of the Plan.

25. Access and recreation

i) The access network (including public footpaths, bridleways and roads, and open access areas) should be valued, protected and maintained as the bedrock of recreation, economic value and nature connection.

ii) Responsible access and sustainable recreation activities should be promoted, with a focus on quiet enjoyment and a strong ethic of care for visitors and providers. All recreation facilities, activities and events should be planned and promoted to ensure no significant impacts upon the local community, landscape, nature, heritage, natural beauty, and tranquillity.

iii) Recreational use of motor vehicles off sealed surface roads should not be encouraged or promoted within the National Landscape. Voluntary measures and pro-active work with users should be used where possible to minimise the impact of legal off-road use of motor vehicles on the landscape and on other people's quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Where local impacts are significant however, measures including traffic regulation orders restricting legal use should be employed. Illegal motorised activities should as far as possible be prevented.

26. Health and wellbeing

i) Opportunities should be maximised for improving people's health and wellbeing from outdoor exercise and relaxation, and from contact with nature and the landscape.

27. Inclusion and new audiences

i) The Shropshire Hills should strive to be a more inclusive and welcoming destination, reaching new audiences. Priority should be

given to inclusivity, equity and diversity and to improving provision for under-served groups and those with special needs.

ii) Access for as wide a range of people as possible should be encouraged, through easing physical access barriers where possible, with reasonable adjustments provided where environmental factors may limit access.

28. Promotion and public engagement

i) Promotion of the Shropshire Hills to visitors should be linked to the special qualities of the National Landscape and should encourage sustainable tourism practices and behaviours, including sustainable and active transport and travel.

ii) Interpretation and a variety of communication and engagement tools should be used to help enhance people's enjoyment, raise understanding of special qualities of the area, and to encourage people to help and participate.

29. Volunteering

i) Active participation in care for the landscape through volunteering and community groups should be encouraged.

30. Visitor management

i) Publicity and other management measures should, through promotion of a wide variety of visitor locations, seek to disperse visitors and spread visits across the area, to reduce pressures at heavily used locations and to spread economic benefits.

31. Education and skills

i) Opportunities should be maximised for outdoor and environmental education, and for skills development linked to caring for the landscape.

Recommendations – People

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

- P 1. Foster mutual understanding among different stakeholders to help build consensus around management of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.
- P 2. Use the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, along with other visitor centres and higher profile staffed visitor sites as gateways to the Shropshire Hills.
- P 3. Promote visitor information services and support visitor facing staff, businesses, and volunteers to be ambassadors for the area.
- P 4. Continue good levels of maintenance of public and recreation facilities on sites which are part of the public forest estate.
- P 5. Manage promoted walking routes to a high standard.
- P 6. Continue the successful Shropshire Hills visitor map.
- P 7. Continue and develop the Shropshire Hills Shuttle service.
- P 8. Continue to support volunteers to undertake path maintenance work through the Parish Paths Network.
- P 9. Continue and expand active engagement and outreach to expand opportunities for underserved groups and to help address health and wellbeing inequalities and barriers.
- P 10. Make more use of social prescribing to spread the benefits that the National Landscape provides for the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors.
- P 11. Support countryside site providers to manage pressurised sites through on the ground repairs, information and influencing patterns of use and behaviour.
- P 12. Co-ordinate and maintain high-quality visitor information, including on available parking and facilities highlighting opportunities to suit all abilities and tastes, including on-line, social media, print and interpretation.
- P 13. Continue to develop a network of providers of countryside sites to share ideas and best practice.
- P 14. Expand the range of visitor sites which are accessible to a people with a wider range of abilities.
- P 15. Increase provision and opportunities for children and young people resident in the area and nearby, to experience the Shropshire Hills and have increased contact with nature.
- P 16. Implement projects to encourage walking and cycling as identified in the Shropshire Great Outdoors Development Plan.
- P 17. Continue a varied programme of events for the public through various organisations and community groups.
- P 18. Maintain funding and investment for maintenance of rights of way, including capital programmes for larger items such as bridges.
- P 19. Raise awareness of the links between sustainable management of the landscape and people's health through food, exercise, nature and relaxation.
- P 20. Continue to maintain and promote the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail.
- P 21. Strengthen training opportunities and pathways to employment linked to caring for the landscape.
- P 22. Support continuation and expansion of care farming and social forestry opportunities.
- P 23. Support and promote opportunities for environmentally friendly activities e.g. horse riding, adventure sports.
- P 24. Strengthen and expand mechanisms for visitors and local people to donate to support conservation work.
- P 25. Improve virtual access and use of digital platforms to reinforce nature connection.
- P 26. Continue to monitor visitor use and trends, and attitudes.

Aspirations – People

(See the explanation of what the Aspirations are)

P(a) Support opportunities for people to have life-changing experiences of nature which in turn promote pro-environmental behaviours.

P(b) Broaden the National Landscape engagement through the new Forum to encourage greater participation.

P(c) Make greater use of arts projects as an engagement tool to reach new audiences.

P(d) Support and promote specific itineraries and products based on visiting and exploring on foot and by bike.

P(e) Seek to engage new sectors in sustainable tourism principles and practices. e.g., creative enterprises, outdoor activity providers and challenge event organisers.

P(f) Develop geological interpretation along the Shropshire Way and update the Shropshire Hills geology trail leaflets.

P(g) Provide more 'changing places' facilities for people with particular needs.

P(h) Develop an Active Travel and Access Priorities map linking gateways and visitor hotspots.



Ukrainian refugees on a supported visit to Stokesay Castle

Extracts from Vision:

Place

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special Place

- The working landscape supports livelihoods
- Heritage assets are looked after
- Cultural heritage is celebrated
- The economy is regenerative and circular

Subsections in this 'Place' section of the Plan:

Landscape including landscaping, tranquillity, dark skies

Heritage and historic environment

Sustainable, circular and regenerative economies:

Tourism and visitor economy

Sustainable transport

The National Landscape **boundary, setting and connections to surrounding area**

Key link to other Plan themes – ***Communities, cultural heritage, connection to place***

"When we work in place we can see the impact and respond. Place is the one unit of measurement that allows us to change our behaviour. If we save the places of the world, we save the planet."

Bill Read, Regenesi Institute.



Landscape

The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as '*An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors*'. This view sees people at the heart of all landscapes, each of which has its own distinctive character and meaning.

The Convention is unaffected by Brexit and the UK remains a signatory. The Convention defines three principles of landscape action:

Protect: action to conserve and maintain the significant characteristic features of a landscape, justified by their natural or cultural value;

Manage: action to ensure the sustainable development and ongoing upkeep of a landscape, guiding changes arising from social, economic or environmental necessity;

Plan: strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscape.



Landscapes comprise a range of components:



Experience – landscapes are all around us and we perceive and value them in many different ways. This can often influence how we manage and care for landscapes.

History – landscapes illustrate time depth. Patterns established in the past, such as field shapes and boundaries, can help to illustrate how landscapes used to be managed and how humans have shaped the landscape.

Land use – current and past land uses help to shape and maintain landscapes, they include all human led processes such as farming, forestry, recreation and settlement.

Wildlife – the natural form of a landscape will affect the types of plants and animals it can support and these, in turn will help to shape the landscape.

Natural form – this includes geology, land form, soils and vegetation. The combination of these can influence how a landscape is used.

Landscaping - good practice for landscaping of new developments would include:

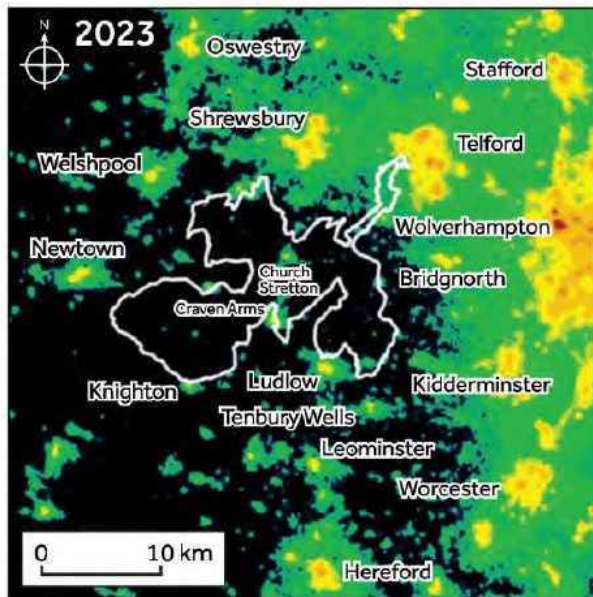
- Careful location, form and design of development (simple 'screening' of poorly considered development is not a substitute for good design, taking into account the character of the local landscape).
- Good landscaping plans which can be understood and commented upon.
- Landscape schemes should be linked to well-designed Biodiversity Net Gain on new developments
- Adopting sustainability principles such as use of local materials, low energy consumption, water conservation, decreasing run-off, etc.
- Retaining and incorporating existing landscape features, including mature trees, old boundary features such as walls and hedges.
- Landscaping which reflects the rural character of the location.
- Minimising use of earth bunding with un-natural form.
- Avoidance of industrial style fencing and especially fencing on top of banks.
- Use of appropriate materials in hard landscaping reflecting rural character, including suitable timber, stone and appropriate bricks where used.
- Well-designed mixed planting of trees and shrubs suitable for the soil type and location. Tree and shrub planting should be predominantly native especially in open countryside locations, but non-native species in character with the area are also acceptable close to clusters of domestic buildings. Native species common in the area include pedunculate and sessile oak, birch, alder, hazel, holly, field maple and various species of willow. Seek advice and see what grows near your site. Avoid conifers such as *Leylandii*.
- Grasslands of higher species diversity, which will often thrive on poorer soils.
- Good maintenance of tree and shrub planting to ensure establishment and growth, including weed control and mulching, protection from browsing animals, and replacement planting where necessary.

Tranquillity, Dark Skies & Light pollution

Tranquillity is one of the less tangible and measurable assets of the National Landscape, but is nevertheless very significant in the way people value the area. CPRE undertook mapping work on this in 2007 and their methodology included assessing a range of objective factors such as levels of noise, light pollution and visual presence of man-made structures, as well as more subjective factors of people's perception, including apparent naturalness and encounters with other people. The Shropshire Hills area is very significant for tranquillity in a regional and local context, and at a national scale, the Shropshire Hills and Marches area generally are significant, along with larger areas of the north and south-west of England.

The key sources of intrusive noise identified in the Shropshire Hills are road and air traffic which are both continuing to increase.

Awareness of light pollution issue has risen, and technology and design has enabled steps to be taken (e.g. street lights which allow much less upward escape of light) and more sensitive security lighting.



Map of artificial light at night clearly shows the value of the Shropshire Hills for dark skies

Heritage and historic environment

The historic environment covers a wide range of heritage assets including buildings and features with statutory protection and those which are locally valued, and also the historic character of the wider landscape and settlements. The character of the landscape, such as the small fields around squatter settlements and different enclosure patterns, has important cultural influences. The physical remains of people interacting with places over time also include archaeological features which are currently unrecorded or unknown.

The historic environment is a finite resource and is continuing to decline and be lost due to development, changes in land management and a lack of understanding and management. This is particularly true of the wider historic landscape and the less visible and undesignated sites which have no protection. Conserving heritage features involves understanding their significance and seeking to manage changes affecting them. There is a need to understand and promote the connectivity of historic sites and their settings as part of the wider landscape in order to effectively conserve and manage historic landscape character. Historic and natural aspects of the environment are closely inter-related – for example hedgerows, veteran trees, parkland and ancient woodland.



Archaeological work on Nordy Bank, Clee Liberty Common

Setting of heritage assets

With better information available now, development proposals which would directly damage defined archaeological features are thankfully rare, but their setting is more often overlooked. Setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may be more extensive than its curtilage. All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not. Setting is often considered mainly in relation to views, but other factors such as quietness and tranquillity can be an important part of a setting. The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on people's current ability to access or experience the setting. Extensive heritage assets, such as historic parks and gardens, landscapes and townscape, can include many heritage assets, historic associations between them and their nested and overlapping settings, as well as having a setting of their own.

Case study - Offa's Dyke Conservation project

The Offa's Dyke Conservation Project is a cross-border initiative with Historic England and CADW, Shropshire Council, the Offa's Dyke Association and the Offa's Dyke National Trail. The project aims to showcase the benefits of integrating people, nature and place around the focus of a monument conservation programme. Focussing on the Dyke corridor has delivered benefits throughout a landscape that we today value for its scenic, historic and nature conservation importance. The project is also being identified in collaborative nature recovery initiatives such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the Welsh Integrated Natural Resources Scheme.



Removal of conifers from Offa's Dyke

Case – study - Fix the Fort

The public appeal to raise money to fix Caer Caradoc's worn-down ramparts generated around £4,000. This was boosted in autumn 2022 with additional funding from HF Holidays (£10,000) and Farming in Protected Landscapes (£13,000), enabling the Fix the Fort project to start. After preparatory archaeological and ground work, 50 bags of stone and soil were airlifted onto the hillside by helicopter. Repairs to the ramparts were made over the winter of 2022-23 with support from some Young Rangers and volunteers. The work has created steps at key points where the footpath crosses the earthworks, and repaired other erosion scars.



Sustainable, circular and regenerative economies

Regenerative concepts have become more prominent in farming and in tourism, but can be applicable to economies and places as a whole. This is where there is an emphasis on economic and human activity actually *improving* the environment and society rather than just seeking to avoid harm. It means looking beyond sustainability and seeing how we can create and nurture the right conditions in which living systems are able to regenerate themselves. This approach will focus on 'upstream' interventions and is in contrast to a linear or extractive economy, which is not only less sustainable but will also be less resilient.

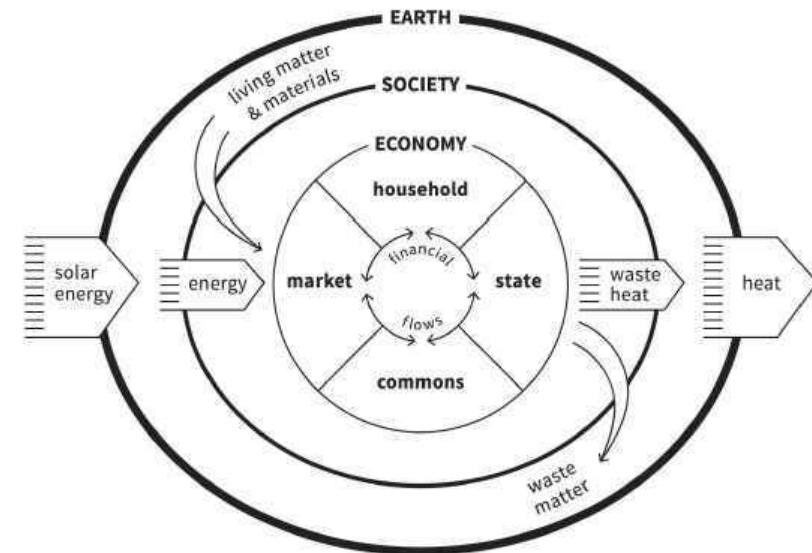
"A regenerative economy means moving away from extractive business models and unlocking the potential for positive contributions for nature and society. Businesses have the potential to be climate positive, socially positive and economically positive by moving beyond a solitary focus on limiting emissions into the environment".

Smith School of Enterprise and Environment, University of Oxford

"The circular economy is a system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling and composting."

Ellen MacArthur Foundation

These concepts are also similar to the 'Wellbeing economy' and to the Doughnut Economics model we have used in our Vision and data portrait profiling.



Economy embedded within society and dependent on the living world

(Credit: Kate Raworth and Marcia Mihotich CC-BY-SA 4.0)

"Economic change that is sourced from place, is a foundational pillar in designing regenerative economies. It deals with the varying aspects of bringing our economies back towards a localised, place-sourced design that derives its thrivability from the five key 'capitals' that surround it – ecological, social, human, production, financial – whilst still operating inside our existing global economy as it slowly transforms."

Really Regenerative Centre

Some key points from the workshop held in the Plan consultation period on Doughnut Economics/ regenerative approaches were:

- keep relating local action to wider systemic change,
- highlight threats posed by widening inequality, and
- maintain momentum of these conversations linking with other groups and networks.

Sustainable or regenerative tourism and visitor economy

As in other fields there is a move from sustainable towards regenerative tourism – looking beyond just minimising impacts, and towards an overall philosophy of how tourism can positively benefit the environment as well as economies and society. This might include businesses contributing and visitors doing volunteer work, but also things such as structures and ownership that build local communities.

The Shropshire Hills holds the Europarc Federation's Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2024-29 has the following strategic themes:

- i. Setting an ambitious sustainable vision for tourism and engaging people with this.
- ii. Improving provision of sustainable tourism services which draw on the area's special qualities.
- iii. Supporting and encouraging environmental practices and behaviours by businesses and visitors.
- iv. Managing the effects of localised visitor pressure, mitigating impacts, and sharing economic benefit by promoting visitor activity across the area.
- v. Co-ordinating and adding value to sustainable tourism delivery.



Roads and Highways

The design and management of the rural road network should reinforce the local character and distinctiveness of the National Landscape. The distinctive character of minor roads contributes to the character of the wider Shropshire Hills landscape and they are an important means for people to experience the National Landscape. Insensitive, over-engineered changes to these roads can have a detrimental impact. The increasing use of larger heavy goods vehicles is having damaging impacts. The availability of electric vehicle charging points is expanding but still fairly low.

Sustainable transport

Transport and accessibility are important in the rural area but remain a barrier to some people, with 8% of households in the Shropshire Hills having no car. Public transport is limited and most people are reliant on private cars. An increase in home-working has reduced the need to travel for some people.

Case study - Shuttles

The Long Mynd & Stiperstones Shuttle bus in 2024 carried over 950 passengers and travelled over 4,600 miles. The Shuttle service continues to be very popular.

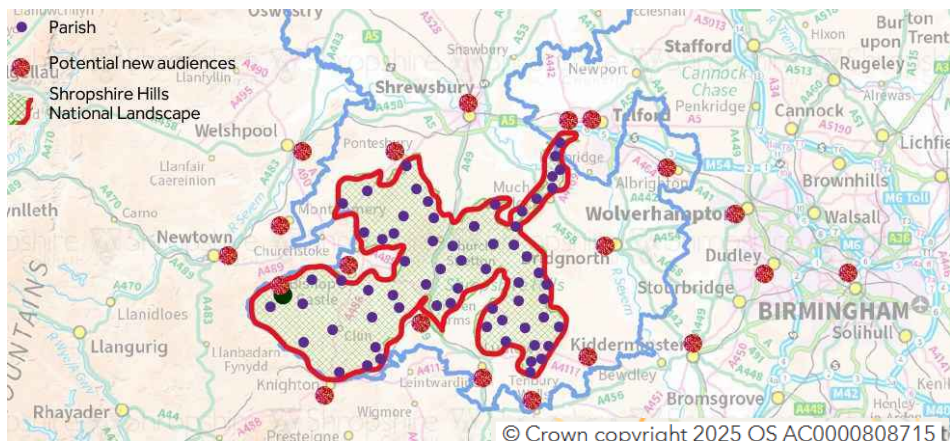


The National Landscape boundary, setting and connections to surrounding area

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape boundary has not been changed since it was drawn up in 1957 leading to the designation as AONB. The conclusion from a study of the boundary commissioned in 2006 was that the boundary was fit for purpose, and the Partnership and the local authorities have since then had a clear policy against seeking to change the National Landscape boundary.

The 'setting' of the National Landscape is the area around it, which adds value to the qualities of the designated area. This is not precisely defined geographically, but it should be considered in planning decisions for developments close outside the boundary. The NPPF requires that development within the setting "should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas."

The National Landscape is an asset to Shropshire and to Telford & Wrekin, and has links across the border to Wales. It is connected to the surrounding area and is not and should not be like an 'island'. It can provide benefits economically, environmentally and socially to the wider area. Most Parishes span the boundary in and outside the National Landscape, and potential new audiences lie in the nearby urban areas. These positive connections with the surrounding area can be built as part of the National Landscape model.



Key link to other Plan themes - Communities, cultural heritage, connection to place

The [Rural Coalition](#) in 2010 described sustainable rural communities as those *"in which people enjoy living and working; which are vibrant, distinctive and in keeping with the character of their surroundings, with a full range of good-quality local services; and which enhance local landscapes, heritage and biodiversity while meeting the challenges of climate and economic change."*

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape is 23% of Shropshire by area but contains only 6% of the county's population. Its sparse population means its economy is therefore different from much of the county, with more small, dispersed rural businesses.

Social balance and cohesion are key to successful communities and this relies on sharing spaces where people can mix. Public spaces whether green or built can have an important role in social cohesion, culture and sense of community. In the Church Stretton Neighbourhood Plan, comments were made about community, integration, social issues, the role of voluntary groups, meeting the needs of everyone etc along with comments relating to the need to make changes to the old market square – it was seen by many as having a role as a meeting place, rather than a car park - the need to maintain shops and services in the town centre etc.



Market at Church Stretton
(Church Stretton Town Council)

Cultural heritage includes both physical artefacts and intangible aspects. Though interpretations of history can be contested, there are often aspects of cultural heritage which can unite people from a locality.

A sense of place is key to people’s connection to where they live, work and visit. Heritage contributes to people’s sense of place and belonging and there are lessons from past ways of living which are relevant to some of our modern day problems.

A place-based approach is about understanding the issues, interconnections and relationships in a place and coordinating action and investment to improve the quality of life for that community.



Thinking about the ‘potential’ of a place to be an even better version of what it is now can open up new ways of thinking, and can be more energising than a conventional focus on problem solving. Here are some ideas around future potential for the Shropshire Hills based on its unique qualities, which can be explored further during the Plan period :

Potential of the Shropshire Hills?

The Place

- Headwater sponge
- Carbon sink
- Nature powerhouse
- Tranquil haven
- Vibrant rural area
- Basis of livelihoods
- A ‘source’ area for its surrounding areas



**The People/
Community/
Culture/
Protected Landscape**

- Connected sharer
- Applicable example
- Inspiring beacon
- Welcoming community
- Model of balance
- Relevant hub

Statutory requirements for Place

(not exhaustive)

Planning – requirements for Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans

Planning requirements to get planning permission for development

Special requirements for major development

Heritage – protection of scheduled monuments and other heritage assets



PLAN POLICIES - PLACE

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

32. Landscape

i) A holistic view of landscape should be adopted in decision making, respecting the principles of the European Landscape Convention to protect, manage and plan for landscapes, and safeguarding the integrity of the sympathetic interaction between people and landscape.

ii) Local distinctiveness should be celebrated, linked to the natural and cultural heritage of the landscape. All development should consider local character and distinctiveness.

iii) Tranquillity should be protected in all aspects – peace and quiet, views, visual harmony, absence of intrusive influences.

iv) Dark skies should be valued, and planning policy and decisions on public lighting should be used to minimise and reduce light pollution.

v) In remoter locations and on hilltops a perceived sense of wildness should be retained and built structures minimised.

33. Heritage

i) Designated heritage sites and assets should be protected, and development should seek to protect and enhance the significance of all heritage assets (including undesignated assets), including their setting.

ii) Measures should be supported to ensure cultural heritage is better understood and celebrated.

34. Regenerative and circular economies

i) A regenerative economy should be fostered, focussing on wise management and wellbeing – an economy which is nature and climate positive, and good for people.

ii) Waste and resource use should be reduced by supporting a circular economy.

35. Tourism and visitor economy

i) New development for tourism and recreation should be of suitable scale and siting, of the highest standards of design and sustainability and avoid harm to the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape. Tourism businesses, facilities, activities, and events should adopt high standards of sustainability.

ii) Tourism activities based on nature and heritage should be prioritised, to increase people's connection to nature and better reveal the significance of heritage assets and their story within the context of the Shropshire Hills.

iii) Development of permanent caravans and chalets should be on a small scale only (e.g. less than 10 units), in suitable locations and following high standards of landscaping of natural and rural character.

36. Sustainable transport

i) Development of infrastructure such as transport and utilities should be sensitive to the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape and seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing it. The rural character of roads and highway network should be maintained, with design and structures in keeping with the high quality landscape.

ii) The use of excessively large vehicles on small rural lanes should be discouraged, including to protect verges and minimise soil loss to rivers.

iii) Maintaining, and extending public transport provision within the National Landscape should be prioritised over the further development of car-based infrastructure.

37. The boundary and setting of the National Landscape

i) The National Landscape boundary should not be formally amended in the foreseeable future, as any benefits would not be justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail. Partners should work in ways which strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills as an area of exceptional landscape value. The National Landscape Team will work in a flexible and pragmatic way in relation to the boundary while seeking the best outcomes and delivery for the designated area.

ii) Development in the setting of the National Landscape should be assessed for its impacts on the designated area itself, and also take account of the landscape quality of the setting. Mitigation measures should consider impacts on the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape.

38. Communities, cultural heritage, connection to place

i) Local councils, including town and parish councils, should support and enable the development of sustainable communities within the National Landscape.

ii) Improved use of built and green public spaces in villages and towns should be encouraged for better social connection and cohesion, and to enhance vitality in communities.

iii) The Shropshire Hills identity and the combined elements of the National Landscape model (Plan, Advisory Committee, Forum, Team, etc) should be strengthened to help support people's motivation to actively care for the area's special qualities.

Recommendations – Place

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

PL 1. Support the development of mixed, balanced and sustainable communities, that are good places for people to live in, and are socially cohesive.

PL 2. Support Parishes and community groups to care for their local landscape. Continue events to link and support community groups taking action for the local landscape.

PL 3. Foster positive economic, social and environmental connections of the Shropshire Hills with its surrounding areas.

PL 4. Promote suitable heritage sites for visitors and encourage greater understanding of heritage.

PL 5. Complete an inventory of public car parking areas in the Shropshire Hills and use this to improve public information for people of all abilities and to aid dispersal of visitors.

PL 6. Take action to bring all Scheduled heritage sites in favourable condition and management, prioritised at sites which are 'At Risk' and 'Vulnerable'.

PL 7. Keep sustainable and regenerative tourism prominent within the area's tourism sector and foster a sense of shared environmental responsibility among both businesses and visitors.

PL 8. Continue targeted conservation action on Offa's Dyke.

PL 9. Continue with the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter, providing a structured framework for sustainable tourism management, optimise learning from the network and promote appropriately.

PL 10. Make sensitive use of improved signage to encourage sense of place and aid orientation of visitors.

PL 11. Promote and improve existing channels for people to give back to the area, e.g., through membership organisations, through the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust's Conservation Fund and potential other specific appeals.

PL 12. Give greater recognition to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape as an asset in the strategies and plans of Councils and public bodies.

PL 13. Maintain the profile of the Shropshire Hills and sustainable tourism in the new Local Visitor Economic Partnership.

PL 14. Strengthen links between Management Plan topics and priorities and Local Transport Planning.

PL 15. Continue to monitor economic trends and patterns in tourism to inform future strategies.

PL 16. Foster local area identities within the Shropshire Hills that support the connection of people to places.

PL 17. Encourage the development of heritage-based tourism activities that draw on the rich cultural heritage of the area and help generate support to maintain heritage assets.

PL 18. Reduce volume of air traffic and make alterations to flight path corridors to decrease the volume and noise impacts of air traffic over the National Landscape.

PL 19. Give priority to community consultation ahead of major development and other significant changes to the landscape, and carry this out early in the design and decision making process.

PL 20. Communities and businesses are encouraged to value and celebrate being part of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

PL 21. Encourage use of the 'Shropshire Hills' name and the new National Landscape branding, to reinforce identity and sense of place. Discourage the forming and use of acronyms such as NL, SHNL which are a barrier to understanding and engagement.

Aspirations - Place

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Aspirations are)

PL(a) Build shared knowledge of regenerative economies and place-making, with principles and examples which could be applied.

PL(b) Use local food to enhance sense of place, distinctiveness and connection to the area.

PL(c) Prioritise and seek a new generation of strategic investment in infrastructure for active travel and recreational walking and cycling including development of multi-user routes along suitable disused former railway lines.

PL(d) Increase promotion of dark skies as a powerful nature experience and as a motivator for improved sustainability on lighting.

PL(e) Increase celebration of cultural heritage to encourage connection and pride of place.

PL(f) Give greater profile of the National Landscape status for the Wrekin area as an engagement tool for the wider Shropshire Hills landscape.

PL(g) Develop material to raise awareness of geology along the Shropshire Way.

PL(h) Create a scheme for volunteers to participate in caring for monuments and heritage features.

PL(i) Improve provision of training for heritage skills.

PL(j) Help tourism businesses to access good sustainability advice and to promote their good practices and gain recognition for these.

PL(k) Use the qualities of the National Landscape and its culture to build association of the Shropshire Hills as somewhere to have a sustainable holiday/visit e.g. a change of pace, physically active, healthy, and low car miles, with a locally distinctive, authentic experience.

PL(l) Undertake landscape sensitivity and capacity assessment to help guide development.

PL(m) Improve the provision of design guidance for built development in the National Landscape.

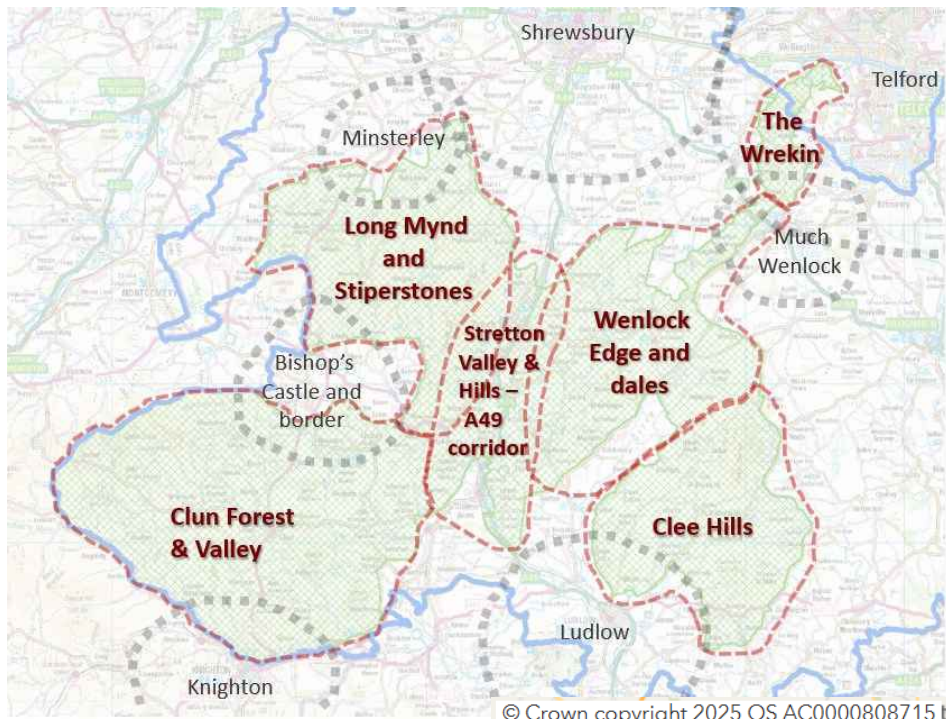
PL(n) Develop work around the re-defined local areas within the Shropshire Hills, and more detailed local sections in the next Plan.



Local priorities for areas of the Shropshire Hills

This part of the Plan looks briefly at the features, particular issues and priorities for six distinct areas within the National Landscape.

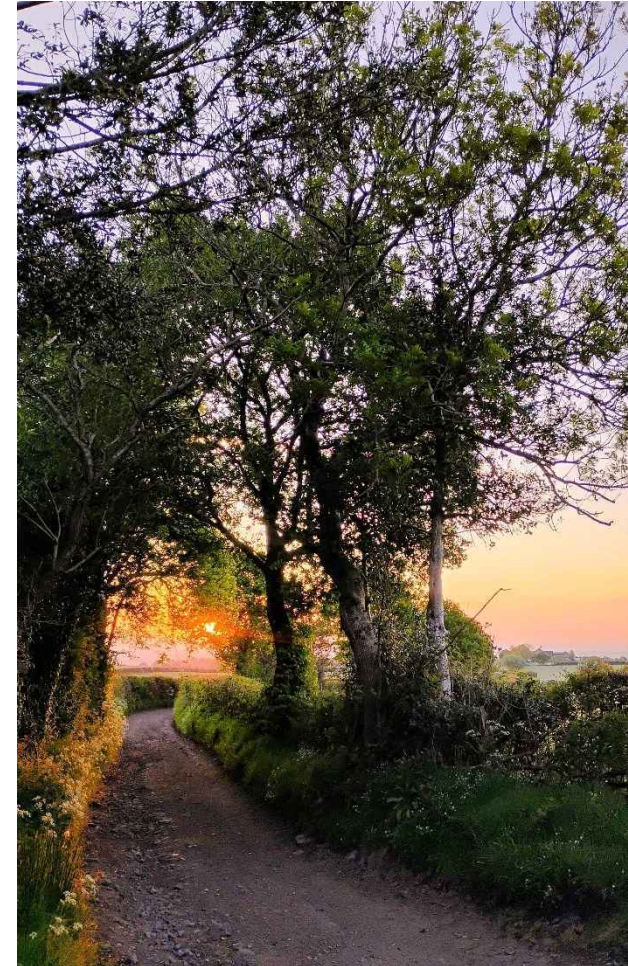
The Shropshire Hills is a large area and has much diversity in its landscape. The sections set out here aim to be based on local areas that are meaningful to people's sense of place. This isn't the same for everyone – some people will relate to the areas shown here more than others. Each of these areas also has distinct local places within it. The lines are not absolute, and some of the areas defined overlap others.



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Local areas within the Shropshire Hills (red)

and the overlapping generalised hinterlands of nearby towns (grey)



Stretton Valley & Hills/ A49 corridor

This area can justifiably claim to be the heart of the Shropshire Hills, with the Stretton valley containing a major transport corridor and the main town in the National Landscape – Church Stretton. Key themes for future effort here are ensuring development is in keeping with the landscape, developing tourism in a sustainable way, and managing the continued increase in outdoor activities.

The A49 corridor makes this the most accessible but also the least tranquil part of the National Landscape. Church Stretton, the main town within the designated area, has a superb setting among the hills, with the Long Mynd, Caer Caradoc and the Lawley providing some of the most iconic images of the Shropshire Hills. The historic character of the town is enhanced by considerable tree cover.

Tourism is more strongly developed in this part of the National Landscape than elsewhere. Carding Mill Valley is the major visitor 'honeypot' site in the Shropshire Hills, predominantly used by day visitors, especially from Shropshire and the West Midlands conurbation. It is carefully managed by the National Trust but reaches capacity on peak days.

Key Issues

Development pressures are the highest here of any part of the National Landscape. Church Stretton has taken its share of new housing and employment development over the years, and the allocation of future sites continues to be contentious. The town identifies strongly with the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, and is seeking to make the most of its location and potential for outdoor activities in the development of tourism in a sustainable way.

Growth in road traffic on the A49 is a concern, and is affected by development well outside the area, including in Shrewsbury and Hereford, and in north and south Wales. This corridor does however offer opportunities for sustainable tourism linked to the railway line and good bus services, and for capturing passing trade through farm shops and other facilities.

Priorities

- The need to retain character and limit the negative impacts of change and development is probably more acute here than anywhere else in the Shropshire Hills. Church Stretton is an important service centre but is also the only one of Shropshire's defined market towns within a nationally protected landscape. The physical capacity for further development may be more limited than other towns, and it is important that the sensitivities of Church Stretton's location within the National Landscape are fully considered in planning decisions.



- A sustainable tourism approach is vital in this part of the Shropshire Hills and also made more possible by the good transport links, attractiveness for walking and landscape interest in the area. This part of the Shropshire Hills is a key link for visitors from Shrewsbury, Telford and more populated areas to the north and east. The development of a better located Visitor Information Centre in Church Stretton would be a real benefit.

- The accessibility of the town enables it to provide services for the benefit of other parts of the Shropshire Hills. Developing further the links between Church Stretton and the National Landscape should allow the town to play a greater role in raising people's awareness of the National Landscape and its value, and to develop increasingly as the natural centre or 'hub' of the Shropshire Hills.

Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities

Stretton Valley – A49 corridor

1. The big areas of **upland heathland** (Long Mynd, Stiperstones) can be enhanced by **restoring habitat beyond the margins and creating/restoring heathland on suitable adjacent sites**, especially to connect smaller outlying areas of heathland e.g. the ridge south of the Stiperstones NNR.
2. The **Stretton Hills** have **fragmentary heathland** in amongst grassland, which could be enhanced by less intensive management.
3. The **wooded dingles** between All Stretton north to Wilderley are strong features in the network of habitats, which could be enhanced by further woodland planting and connections.
4. The **woods of the Stretton Valley** form a good network which could be developed further.



Long Mynd & Stiperstones

This is undisputably a 'core' part of the Shropshire Hills in terms of landscape, identity and biodiversity. The important large conservation sites of the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones are also popular walking destinations, and lie among hill farms undergoing significant change, and sparse remote communities. Finding ways to integrate farming with conservation, and of enabling local people to benefit from sustainable patterns of use by visitors, are key to the future of this area.

The area has the biggest concentration of upland and of semi-natural habitat within the Shropshire Hills, including the largest areas of heathland. Much of the high ground is designated for nature conservation, and land ownership by conservation bodies (including Natural England, the National Trust and Shropshire Wildlife Trust) is more extensive here than anywhere else in the National Landscape. Although there is a sense of 'wildness', the upland commons are carefully managed by grazing and linked with the surrounding farms.

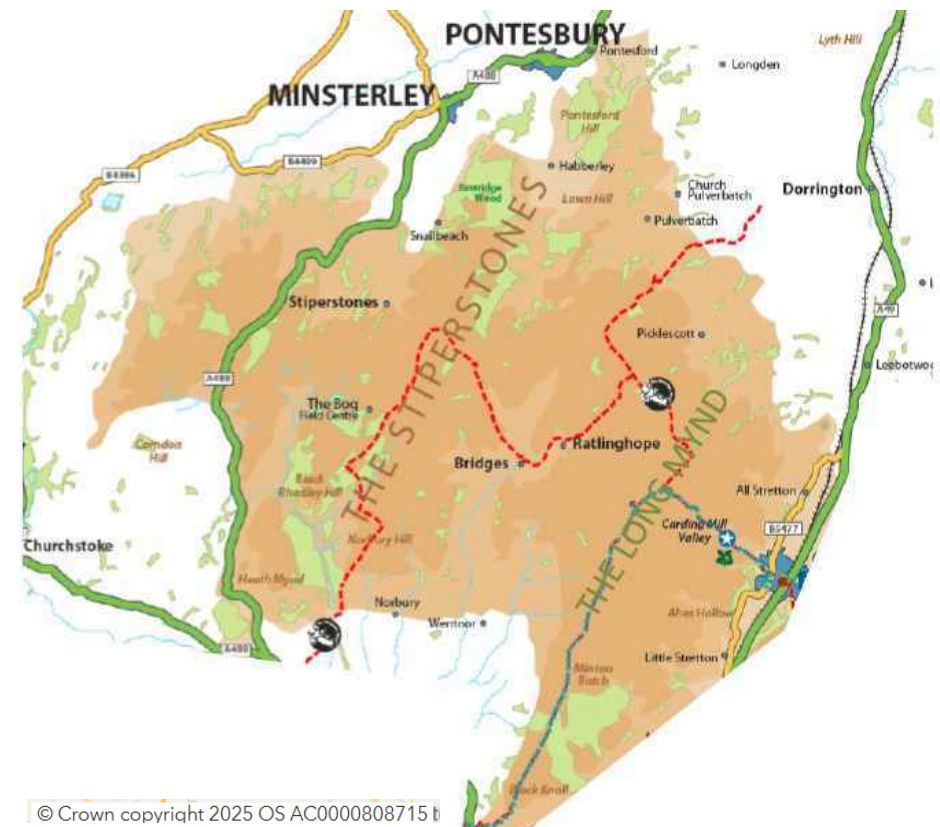
The mosaic of habitats on farmland is also of great value. A high priority needs to be given to retaining and building the inter-relationship between conservation sites and farmed land.

As well as the extensive open access hill land, the area also has many footpaths and a good bridleway network, is crossed by the Shropshire Way and served by the Shropshire Hills Shuttles bus service.

The Onny Valley between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones has a strong farming character, with sparse villages, and some focal points for visitors such as The Bridges and Wentnor. There is a gradual transition down the valleys from upland to more intensive lowland farms with more arable land. To the west of the Stiperstones there are more smallholdings, and links become stronger across the border with Wales.

The area is important for species such as harebell and mountain pansy, small pearl-bordered fritillary and grayling butterflies, otter, dormouse, curlew, lapwing and barn owl. Small hay meadows survive, with woods and scattered scrub on steeper slopes, and high-quality rivers like the East and West Onny. The area has an interesting geology, being crossed by the Pontesford–Linley Fault, and with minerals formerly exploited including lead and barytes.

Historic features include hillforts and prehistoric settlements, classic rectangular Parliamentary enclosure field patterns on Prolley Moor, and mining relics around the Stiperstones. Other significant landscape features include Mitchell's Fold stone circle, Linley Beeches and Bromlow Callow.



Community involvement in wildlife and heritage is strong in this area through groups such as the Upper Onny Wildlife Group and those involved with former mining sites now open to visitors such as Snailbeach and the Bog.

The Upper Onny Farmer Group has become well established in recent years and is providing a very valuable forum for farmers in the area.

Key Issues

The area has long views and is quiet, making it very sensitive to inappropriate development, either visually or through intrusive activities. Retaining upland farming and encouraging its activity to be in keeping with the environment is key to conserving the area's character.

The transition of farm conservation funding to the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme will be significant. Pasture-fed sheep and cattle are the main enterprises, but mixed farming can also have environmental benefits. Many farms cross the border with Wales, thus adding an extra level of complexity for being in schemes.

Diversification is likely to continue, and the area has high potential for enterprises based on wildlife, landscape, and heritage. Increasing visitor numbers could create problems, and a sustainable, low-impact approach is necessary, minimising traffic and noise. Encouraging visitors to stay longer, experience more and spend more is preferable to simply chasing greater footfall.

Priorities

- Farm environmental schemes are vitally important as a means of delivering conservation activity on the ground, and the continued transition over the coming years is crucial. Continued active engagement with farmers and with the wider community, and advice and exchange of practical ideas have an important role to play.
- For visitors, the connection to the Shropshire Hills and links into it from the north should be developed, e.g. from Pontesbury and Minsterley. Both of these settlements could benefit economically from development of more services for visitors. The profile of the Shropshire Hills in Shrewsbury should be raised and its proximity to this part of the National Landscape is an advantage. The possibility of developing a cycle/multi-user route out of Shrewsbury in this direction would be of benefit to the National Landscape.
- Local food activity has significant potential to act as a bridge between farming, conservation and visitors. The pubs and visitor facilities in the area provide an important means of developing this.

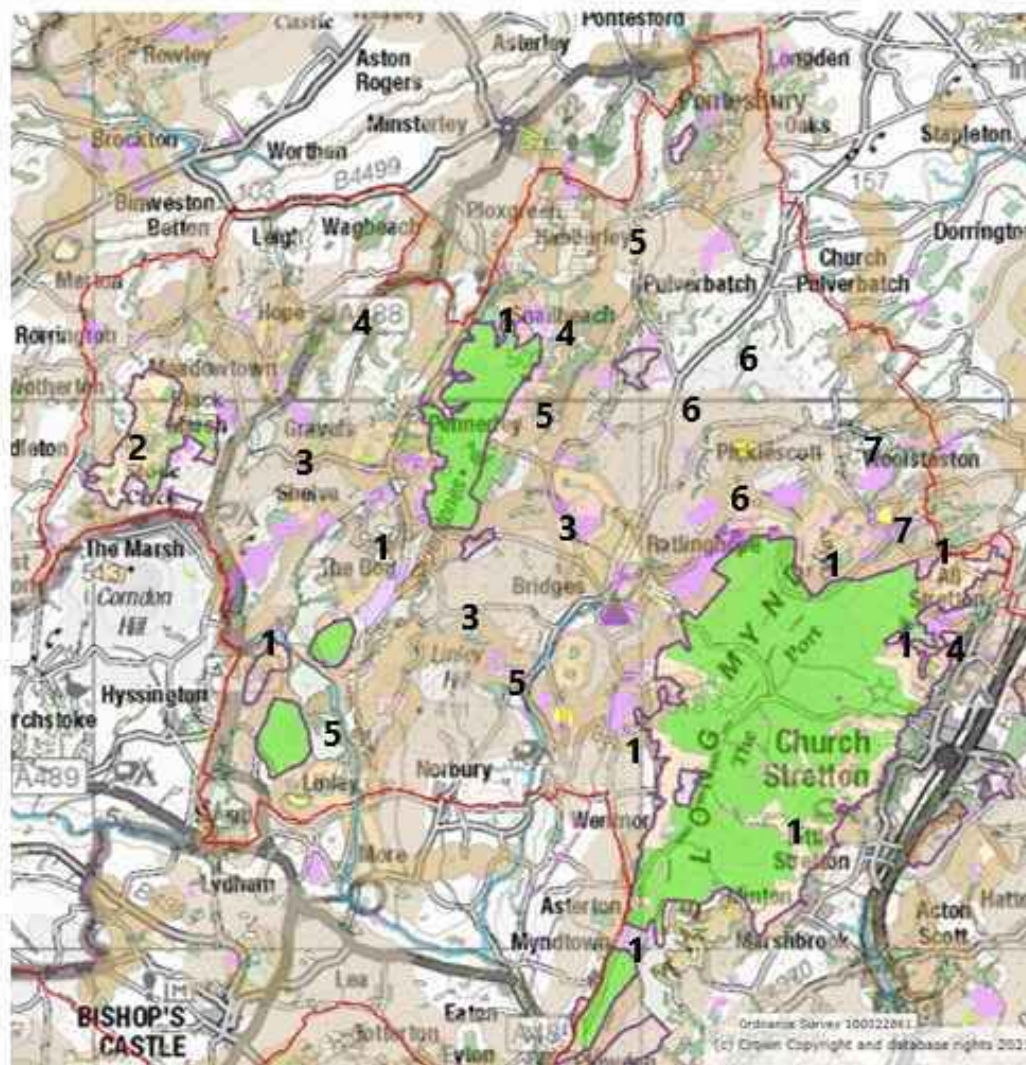


Looking down to the Cardingmill reservoir

Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities

Long Mynd – Stiperstones area

1. The big areas of **upland heathland** (Long Mynd, Stiperstones) can be enhanced by **restoring habitat beyond the margins and creating/restoring heathland on suitable adjacent sites**, especially to connect smaller outlying areas of heathland e.g. the ridge south of the Stiperstones NNR.
2. **Stapeley Common** has **fragmentary heathland** in amongst grassland, which could be enhanced by less intensive management.
3. The **'bridges' of higher land between Long Mynd and Stiperstones** are obvious (around Gatten Hill and Linley/Norbury Hill) to enhance links of better quality habitat, probably more of rough grassland with ffridd and scrub than heathland. There are similar links west from Stiperstones across the high ground around Shelve, towards Stapeley Common.
4. The **woods** around the Stiperstones and Hope Valley form a strong network to enhance with further planting and connections, similarly the woods of the Stretton valley.
5. The **Habberley Brook catchment** has strong potential for enhanced habitat networks, starting up at the Stiperstones and leading down to the important area of mixed good habitats around Earl's Hill. The East and West **Onny Valleys** also have good potential.
6. The potential of connecting better upland habitats along the **high ground of the Portway north of the Long Mynd**, Cothercott/Wilderley Hill and Paulith Bank is under-represented on the map, as is the potential for enhancing woodland, grassland and scrub/rough habitats in the valley above Pulverbatch.
7. The **wooded dingles** between All Stretton north to Wilderley are strong features in the network of habitats, which could be enhanced by further woodland planting and connections.



Existing priority habitats are the brighter colours – green is heathland and grassland, purple is good semi-improved grassland. The Moorland Line is edged in purple. The more extensive pale brown areas are zones defined for network enhancement and expansion and action to address fragmentation.

Clun Forest & Valley

This very rural area is perhaps more dependent on farming than any other part of the Shropshire Hills. Some strong networks have been established, and these are important for managing change in farming to provide the best outcomes for both the landscape and the community. The River Clun and its catchment is a focus for conservation activity, and people enjoy the heritage and tranquillity of this area.

The Clun Forest (the old name for the Clun uplands) and the Clun Valley are the most deeply rural part of the National Landscape and is amongst the most sparsely populated parts of England. Bounded to the west by the Welsh border, the area comprises the catchment of the River Clun and part of that of the upper River Teme. Relative soft shale and siltstone rocks create a rolling, rounded topography, with enclosed and cultivated fields right up to the hilltops, except where remnant and restored heathland remain, such as at Rhos Fiddle and Mason's Bank. There are a number of large, mainly coniferous Forestry Commission woods in the lower Clun valley, some of which support the nationally rare Wood White butterfly. Smaller conifer woods higher up are valued for shelter but could be improved for landscape and nature. Broadleaved woodlands are less common and tend to be small and on steeper slopes and gullies.

Just outside the National Landscape, a section of the River Clun close to its confluence with the Teme is designated a Special Area of Conservation for the rare freshwater pearl mussel, which is in serious decline. The River Clun and its tributaries are largely tree-lined, but alder disease, stock access to riverbanks and factors affecting water quality such as nutrients and siltation, are contributing to poor condition of the river for the pearl mussel and other wildlife. Much project work over a period of years targeted at these factors has made some progress, but the issue is becoming more critical.

Offa's Dyke runs north-south across the area, in some of its best preserved and dramatic sections. It connects the Shropshire Hills with other areas along the border including Herefordshire and Radnor and the Clwydian Range. Other archaeological earthworks in the area include Bury Ditches hillfort, and the Upper and Lower Shortditches near the Kerry Ridgeway. The small town of Clun is a natural centre for the area, and its prominent ruined castle shows that this has long been the case. The market towns of Bishop's

Castle and Knighton lie just outside the National Landscape to the north and south, with Craven Arms to the east.

The pattern of landholding here is more of medium-sized family farms, with fewer large estates and less smallholding than elsewhere. Livestock rearing dominates, but as the soil is relatively good, potatoes and other crops are cultivated even high up. Tourism and recreation are generally at a lower level than elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills, although Clun and the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail are popular with visitors, and promoted walks are helping to develop the area's potential for sustainable tourism.



Key Issues

Changes in farming will probably have the greatest influence on this area's future. A high age profile in the farming community, rising costs and the difficulty of making livestock products pay in a competitive global market are felt as keenly here as anywhere, sometimes compounded by the relative isolation of the area. Uptake of former agri-environment schemes was very high, and the transition to new schemes will be significant for both the landscape and farm incomes.

The National Landscape team has given support over many years to the Land, Life & Livelihoods group which aims to bring farmers and the rest of the community together and help to secure a sustainable future for the upper Clun Forest part of the area. The group has held many events and practical steps such as advice workshops for farmers. The Upper Clun

Community Wildlife Group is also active in monitoring important species, and in encouraging land-owners and managers to maintain and improve habitats for them.



The National Landscape Team has been very active in the Clun Catchment for many years, working with farmers on riparian habitat management, community involvement and an integrated catchment approach. The Clun Catchment Partnership helps to improve co-ordination and raise the profile of the issues with organisations, landowning and community representatives.

Large scale poultry farming has been expanding and is now found further up in the catchment, prompting concerns about landscape impacts and cumulative nutrient input.

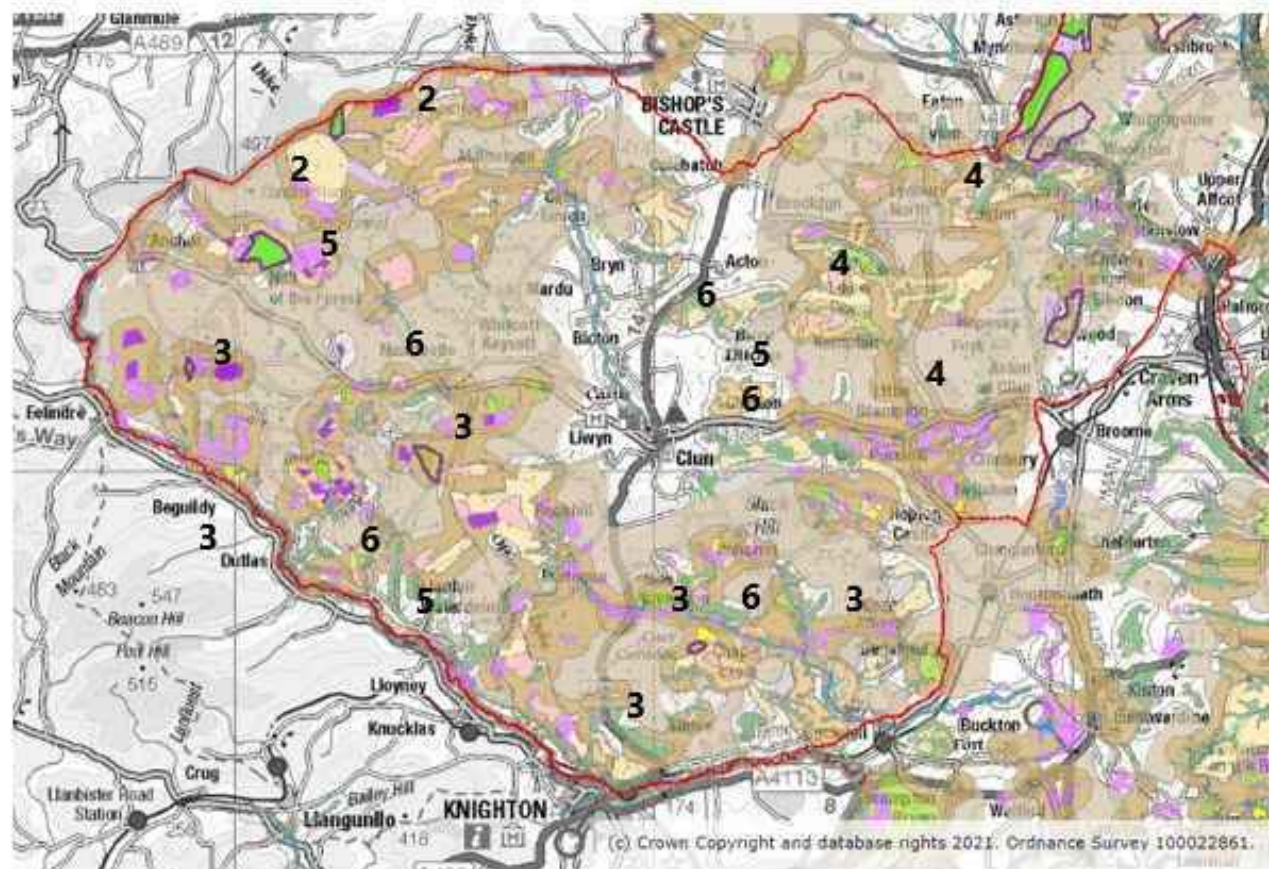
Priorities

- The condition of the rivers (the River Clun SAC and the River Teme SSSI) is an over-riding priority, and links with many other aspects, as it is dependent on activity throughout the catchments. The planning aspects of the River Clun are discussed elsewhere in the Plan. The quality of water and habitats is affected by land management practices near to the rivers themselves, but will also benefit from restoration of heath and wetland habitats and any increases in woodland and tree cover. Continued co-ordinated partnership working and funding for the Clun catchment will be necessary to address the significant issues here.
- The future of farming brings big challenges and issues which are not easily tackled. The continuation of livestock rearing and appropriate cropping are both important for the landscape. Initiatives to reach local markets have been used by some farmers, but the capacity of local markets may not be adequate for this to work for a majority of farmers. Continued development of farmer and community networks and working together will be crucial.
- Tourism development will need to be very sensitive to avoid spoiling the area's quiet rural character. Approaches which make the most of tranquillity and opportunities to slow down and appreciate the natural, historic and cultural features of the area will be the most appropriate.



Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities Clun Valley

1. **Heathland and good quality grassland habitat is limited in extent and very fragmented** across the whole area. There are however **extensive areas of high ground** with improved grasslands which have potential to link the better patches in good habitat networks.
2. The **headwaters of the Folly Brook and the Unk** is the strongest area of upland habitat network, from Rhos Fiddle north-east towards the Kerry Ridgeway. Habitat restoration in the connecting areas would be a top priority.
3. The potential network of good upland habitat across **high ground south of the River Clun** extends for the full length of the valley from around Black Mountain through Llanfair Hill, Stowe Hill above the Teme and Black Hill to Hopton. The high ground and habitat network extends over the border into Wales.
4. A different network of **lowland habitats is obvious in the lower Clun valley and the Kemp valley** (Walcot to Clunbury). This connects in the north to the Onny Valley around Plowden.
5. This map and modelling undervalues the **river corridors** – the main River Clun and other tributaries and the River Teme SSSI are all important habitat network corridors, as well as the Redlake and Unk which are shown.
6. The **woodland networks** along the River Clun, Teme and Redlake are strong (also around Bury Ditches) and should be linked with more woodland creation.



Existing priority habitats are the brighter colours – green is heathland and grassland, purple is good semi-improved grassland. The Moorland Line is edged in purple. The more extensive pale brown areas are zones defined for network enhancement and expansion and action to address fragmentation.

Clee Hills

This large part of the National Landscape contains very contrasting areas, but is characterised by the influences of the minerals industry, of traditional farming and of larger settlements further to the east. Maintaining and enhancing quality in the landscape and making the most of the area's undervalued features of interest are important challenges for the future.

The south-eastern part of the Shropshire Hills is dominated by the main hills of Brown Clee (Shropshire's highest point) and Titterstone Clee. Heath and common land on the tops of these are accompanied by disused and active quarries as well as prominent telecommunications and radar structures. The mark of industry is strong here, and the beauty of a harsher kind than elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills.



The Clee Hills are a distinct area of upland separated from those further west. There are some significant areas of common land including Clee Liberty, Clee Hill and Catherton Commons. The hills are surrounded by a high plateau of sandstone with red soils and mostly enclosed pastoral land. Villages are often small and scattered, and there are some medieval deserted settlements. Clee Hill is the largest village, and bears a strong influence of past and present mining and quarrying. The high point of the A4117 on Clee Hill Common provides remarkable views south to the Malvern

Hills, Herefordshire and beyond. The old squatter settlements associated with former mining result in a surviving pattern of small land holdings, including non-agricultural uses. Small hay meadows and high quality grasslands survive in amongst these.

In the west the area extends to the perimeter of Ludlow and along the edge of the Corve Dale, where larger traditional country estates are found. To the east lie very rural villages like Ditton Priors and Burwarton, but there are increasingly good links with the market towns of Bridgnorth and Cleobury Mortimer, and also more commuting to the West Midlands conurbation. There are substantial woodlands on the eastern flanks of Brown Clee near Burwarton.



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The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group is well established. Clee Liberty common participated in the national 'Our Upland Commons' project and is now in Higher Level Stewardship. The Clee View Farmers Group has gained momentum in recent years and now covers a large area both within and beyond the National Landscape.

Key Issues

The issues of change in farming, especially in the livestock sector, are found here as elsewhere. The proximity of Ludlow and its local food culture is a factor in the south and west of the area. Woodlands are also a valuable resource in the area, and retaining their landscape value is important as they are affected by fluctuating timber prices.

Priorities

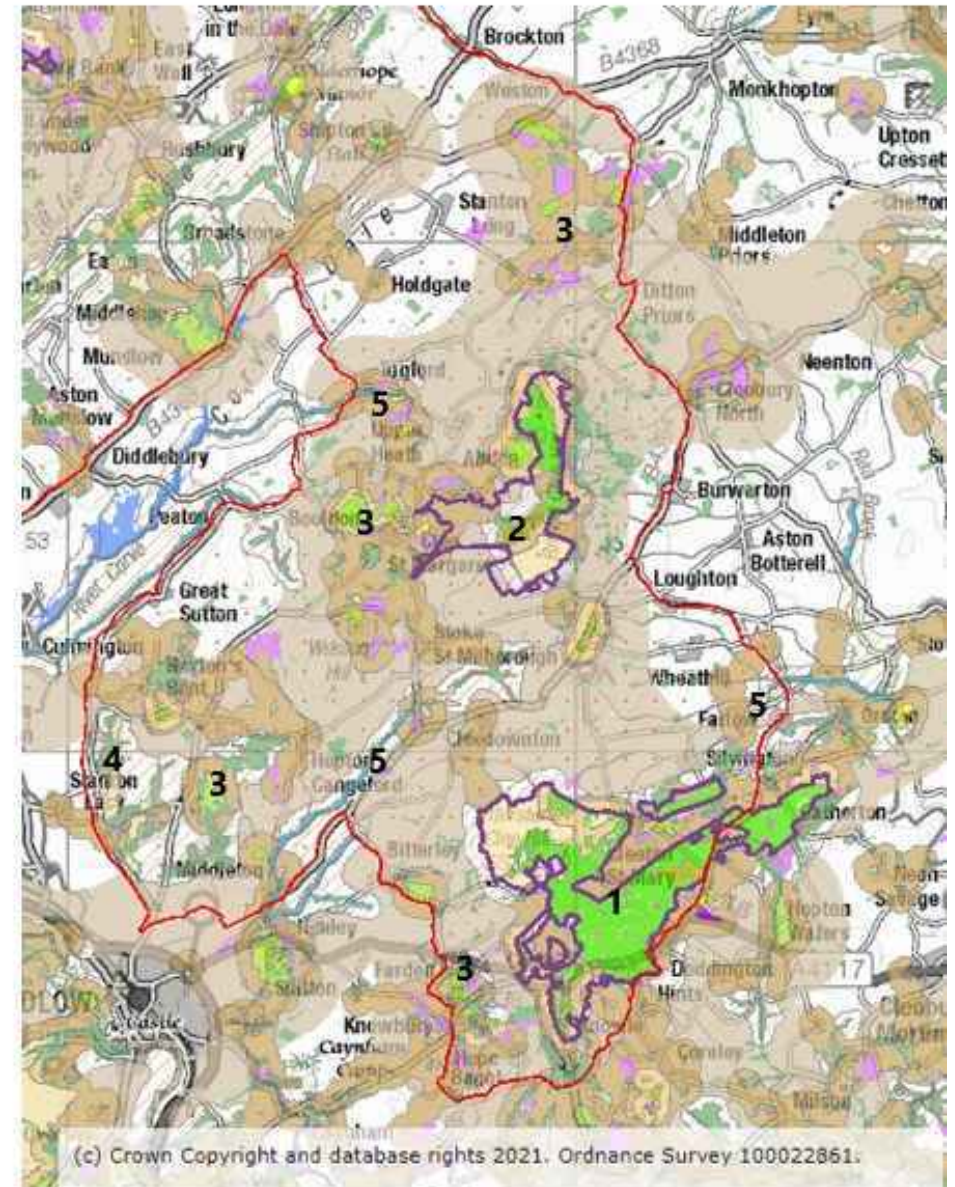
- Improving habitat networks, especially around the main hills is important. Farm environmental schemes and co-operative working with landowners and commoners will be important means of achieving this.
- Developing tourism sustainably will mean a small scale of developments in remoter locations, connecting to walking, cycling and horse riding opportunities. It should involve drawing on the potential of industrial archaeology and geological interest through improved interpretation. Patterns of anti-social use of some of the less attractive former mining and quarrying sites may require concerted efforts to influence.
- The heritage of the area including 19th Century quarrying remains and hydro scheme are significant and there is potential for conservation activity, community involvement, volunteering, and interpretation linked to these.



Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities Clee Hills

1. The **extensive upland heaths and grasslands of Titterstone Clee/ Clee Hill** are the strongest habitat network, extending east out of the National Landscape at Catherton Common. Improving condition of the core sites and habitat creation/ restoration around the margins would be a high priority.
2. The **upland heathlands and grasslands at Brown Clee** are also an important network, with similar priorities.
3. Other network potential areas shown are mostly based on good **lowland grassland habitats, and with woodlands interspersed**. Habitat creation in the connecting zones would be the priority, avoiding establishing any new woodland on good grassland habitat. There are further small hay meadows are scattered across this area which do not show at this scale.
4. The **western edge of the Clee plateau** has strong woodland networks which could be enhanced by further connecting planting.
5. The **stream corridors** are always important network elements, though in this part of the Shropshire Hills they are mostly small headwater streams.

Existing priority habitats are the brighter colours – green is heathland and grassland, purple is good semi-improved grassland. The Moorland Line is edged in purple. The more extensive pale brown areas are zones defined for network enhancement and expansion and action to address fragmentation.



Wenlock Edge & Dales

More lowland in character than much of the Shropshire Hills, the Apedale and Corvedale either side of Wenlock Edge are relatively quiet and secluded. The National Trust own and manage substantial parts of Wenlock Edge. This famous wooded limestone escarpment is a major landmark, running over 20 miles from near Much Wenlock to Craven Arms and separates Ape Dale from the Corve Dale. There are significant former quarry sites on the back of Wenlock Edge, along with areas of species-rich calcareous grassland. The Corve Dale lies mostly outside the National Landscape but is of conservation value through its many heritage features, the River Corve itself, veteran trees including black poplar, and in views between Wenlock Edge and the Clee Hills.

Key Issues

Farming is more diverse in this area due to lower-lying and better quality land, and so has more options for the future than the uplands. More intensive methods and large agricultural buildings therefore have potential to impact the landscape quality of the area.

Ash dieback will be a particular issue in this part of the Shropshire Hills where ash is more common on the lime-rich soils, especially around Wenlock Edge.

Some former quarry sites on Wenlock Edge have been re-used for industrial activities, which may have limited the areas potential of this part of Wenlock Edge to develop into a really significant visitor destination and contributor to the sustainable tourism economy. There remains a need to maximise opportunities for conservation and quiet enjoyment where possible.

Priorities

- Sustainable farming activities here will include more measures for arable land such as field margins.
- The recently re-opened Acton Scott Heritage Farm has important potential for sustainable tourism and for traditional skills education.
- Improved off-road cycling provision along Wenlock Edge as a strategic route would be beneficial.

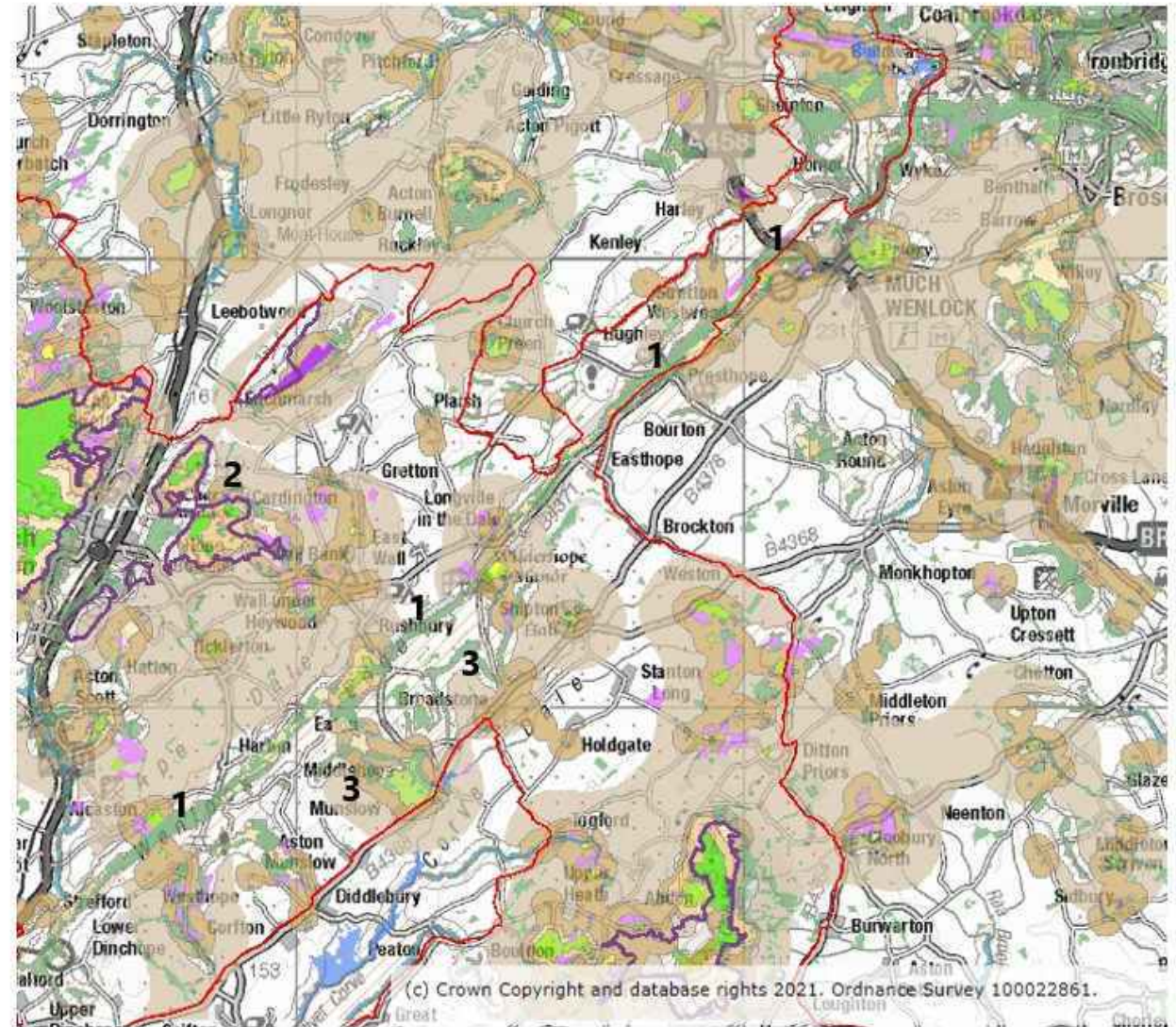


Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities

Wenlock Edge and Dales

1. The narrow but continuous **woodland along the steep face of Wenlock Edge** is one of the strongest habitat network features. Close around it are some valuable calcareous grasslands, with potential for more of these. New woodland planting should avoid sites with good potential as grassland habitat.
2. The **Stretton Hills** form the main area of upland habitats, extending south and east into more lowland grassland with woodland network areas.
3. The **south side of Wenlock Edge** has some well developed **wooded dingles** leading down to the Corve Dale, also with pockets of good grassland.

Existing priority habitats are the brighter colours – green=heathland and grassland, purple is good semi-improved grassland. The Moorland Line is edged in purple. The more extensive brown areas are zones defined for network enhancement and expansion and action to address fragmentation.



The Wrekin

The Wrekin area is rich in geology, wildlife and views. Extending into the Telford & Wrekin Council area, it also has its own users, audiences and partners. The same principles of retaining and enhancing landscape quality and engaging with local people are nevertheless still relevant. The need here to protect the environment and to manage people's enjoyment of it, is as significant as anywhere in the Shropshire Hills.

The Wrekin is Shropshire's iconic hill, and being surrounded by lower ground, affords excellent views over much of the county and beyond. Lying on the urban fringe of Telford, with significant new development nearby it has high levels of recreational and community use.

The woodlands on the Wrekin and the Ercall are of high quality (SSSI), and important for their geology. The area is rich in industrial archaeology and has strong connections to the nearby Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The town of Wellington has very strong cultural links with the Wrekin. The National Landscape boundary is drawn tightly around the wooded hills of the Wrekin and the Ercall, and so the quality of the surrounding area is very important as a setting for the National Landscape. The Wrekin is very important both locally and for those visiting the area, especially the main path up the north side of the hill, which is valued by a wide cross-section of people for fresh air, views and exercise.

Key Issues

The high level of recreational use of the Wrekin creates pressure, including unauthorised mountain biking as well as the volume of foot traffic. There is no real framework or adequate resources to manage this pressure, resulting in the landscape quality and visitors' experience being less than optimal.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust manage the main car park at Forest Glen. Visitor management at the Wrekin would however benefit from a more co-ordinated approach and adequate resourcing, given its importance and scale of use. There is scope to further improve parking provision and visitor facilities at or in proximity to the Wrekin, managing pressures and strengthening the quality of recreational offer. These however need to be

planned with sensitivity to the location and to visitor management issues and have a viable business model.

Telford & Wrekin Council have defined the Wrekin Forest (a wider area than that included in the National Landscape) as a 'Strategic Landscape' in their Local Plan, which gives it some additional recognition and protection.

The redevelopment of the former Ironbridge Power Station close to the National Landscape near Buildwas will be a big factor over the coming years. The implementation of development needs to be appropriate and sensitive to this location.



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Priorities

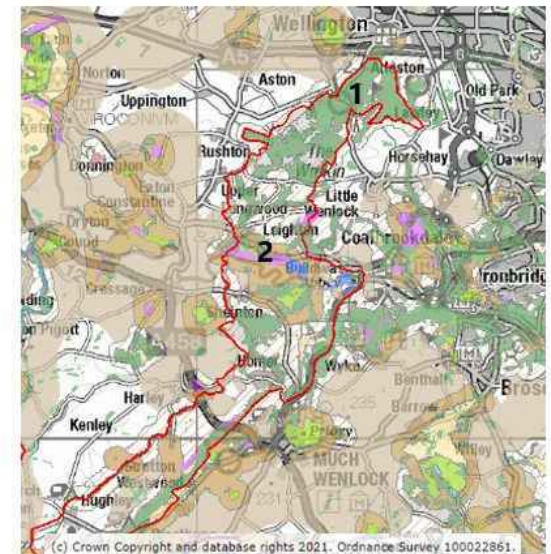
- Development on the eastern fringes of the Wrekin and near Ironbridge needs to respond to the distinctive character of the area.
- A stronger mechanism is desirable for managing the high environmental quality of the Wrekin area and its continued use by visitors. On the ground capacity to take practical action and engage with visitors is a key tool to maintain the quality of a well-used countryside site.
- Enjoyment of the Wrekin area's countryside should go along with promoting understanding of its qualities. Opportunities for participation through activities such as conservation volunteering can be improved.
- Recognition of the national importance of the National Landscape designation could be given a higher profile in the Wrekin area. Management of the Wrekin area should link in different directions to the wider Shropshire Hills, to Telford's green infrastructure, and to the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.
- Priority areas for conservation action will continue to include the woods, other habitats and wildlife, and cultural heritage. Strengthening connections with local people, improvements to access, and community involvement through events, education and volunteering also remain key themes.



Nature recovery network strengths and opportunities

The Wrekin

1. The **Wrekin/Ercall** is a very strong woodland habitat network, linking with the more extensive woods of the Severn Valley.
2. The **River Severn** is an important river habitat corridor, though only a short length is within the National Landscape.



Delivery

The Plan is for the Shropshire Hills as an area and not for any single organisation. There is no single budget or programme for delivery, so the Plan seeks to influence, guide and suggest rather than setting out a defined schedule of actions which may not prove feasible.

This section sets out information and some priorities on:

- **Overall model for shared delivery**
- **Deliverers** – the wide range of organisations and actors that have a role
- **Funding** – from many potential sources
- **Partnership working** – structures, processes and culture which support delivery
- **Potential project themes** – suggested priority projects flowing from the earlier theme sections



Overall model for shared delivery

A wide range of organisations, as well as land managers, community groups and individuals, do things which deliver and support the vision of the Plan. They don't all do these things directly because of the National Landscape or because of the Plan. There is a complex overlay with the varied drivers and priorities of deliverers, including many synergies – especially with activities such as nature and heritage conservation, sustainable land management, promotion of outdoor recreation and management of visitor sites, and youth involvement.

The Plan and the processes that support it have potential to:

- maximise the **synergies** between others' priorities and those of the National Landscape,
- help to **co-ordinate activity** between partners and deliverers,
- provide a '**centre of gravity**' and focus which builds momentum,
- through understanding and dialogue, help **to minimise any conflicting directions** within partner activity, and encourage partners to adapt their activities where possible to achieve better benefits for the National Landscape.

This Plan for the first time applies the 'theory of change' approach, to help understand the processes and pathways to achieving the outcomes that the Plan seeks. We have not undertaken a full Theory of Change methodology, but the analysis on the following page has proved useful. It highlights the importance of the 'hearts and minds' link, and people's attachment to 'place' in motivating them to take action. **'Projects' and delivery often tend to focus on technical solutions, but their impact can be greater if at the same time, we are also trying to shift institutional and cultural norms, systems, and wider still to tap into or shift underlying values.** These broader or higher levels will be more effective for generating lasting and transformative change.

Analysis informed by Theory of Change

The Protected Landscape model – designation, structure etc

Recognition as a special place
 Pride & connection
 Political support
 Greater knowledge and understanding of the landscape and issues
 Support/ networks/ encouragement
 Funding & resources
 Partnership structure
 Staff team capacity to convene/enable/deliver
 Part of wider family/network
 Opportunities for enjoyment
 Opportunities to support and get involved

How is this implemented in practice?

Management Plan
 Partners
 Staff
 Projects
 Events
 Communications
 Charitable trust

Also through partners:

Grants
 Advice & guidance
 Demonstration sites
 Volunteering opportunities
 Regulation
 Conservation ownership

Connection and Pride ('Hearts and minds')

plus **Inspiration**
 plus **Support**
 plus **Shared sense of ownership**
 leads to
Motivation and Skills to act, e.g.

- Managing land differently
- Joining in group actions
- Behaviour choices
- Using economic power as consumers
- Advocating to others
- Action reinforces people's commitment

by

Stakeholders (who)

National Landscape Team, Partnership, & Trust
 Key partner organisations (especially relevant authorities)
 Land managers
 Other partners
 Community groups & organisations
 Businesses
 Individuals – residents, visitors

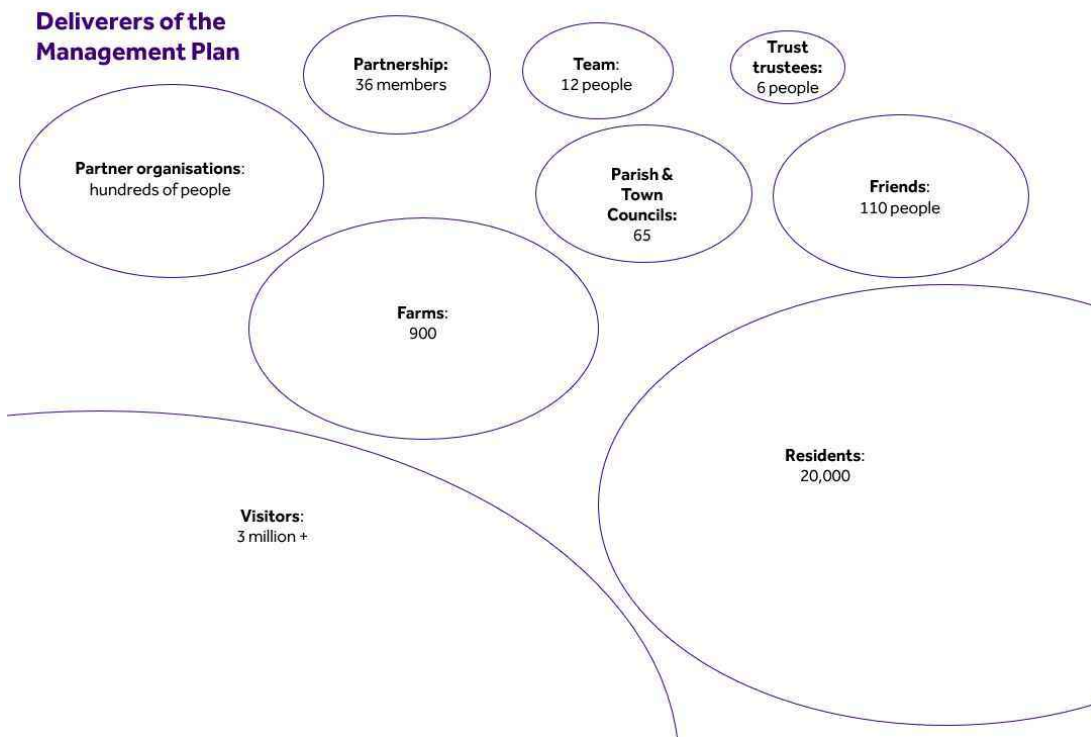
Outcomes:

More activity to support the landscape, nature, climate
 Nature, climate, landscape & heritage in better condition
 More people, further involved and with improved wellbeing
 Stronger sense of community
 Reduced conflict, more consensus
 People alter environmental behaviours more generally
 Protected landscapes influence the wider world – as models of sustainability

Deliverers

Public bodies have strong role and a duty to seek further the purpose of designation and the Plan helps guide how they can do that. The National Landscape Team are there to deliver some of the Plan's ambitions, but also to enable, support and animate others and provide a degree of coordination. The Team are only one part of delivery.

The dozens of organisations, 65 parish and town councils, the 900 farmers, hundreds of businesses, 20,000 residents and over 3 million visitors a year can all play their part, and this is key to upscaling activity in support of the National Landscape.



Relevant authorities (for the new duty to 'seek to further' the purpose)

Further detail on the duty is in [Appendix 3](#).

Relevant authorities who are currently well engaged include:

- Shropshire Council
- Telford & Wrekin Council
- Forestry Commission
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Parish & Town Councils (variable engagement)

Relevant authorities currently not well engaged include:

- Statutory Undertakers – rail and utilities companies (water and sewerage such as Severn Trent, electricity, gas, telecommunications)
- National Highways
- Government departments
- Some departments of the Councils

Plus many other public bodies which are relevant authorities.

There is also a need to liaise with neighbouring local authorities such as Herefordshire and Powys Councils regarding cross-border issues.



Stakeholder delivery – priority actions

We can identify some key roles for certain organisations as follows:

Organisation/Stakeholder	Desired role and priority actions regarding the Shropshire Hills National Landscape
DEFRA	Update, broaden and strengthen legal purposes. Provide consistent funding. Operate ELM scheme.
Natural England	Responsible for SACs, NNRs and SSSIs. Operate Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative. Undertake enforcement roles appropriately.
All Relevant Authorities	Recognise the special qualities of the National Landscape, make it a priority area for action and different to other places.
Forestry Commission	Grants and regulatory roles for woodlands.
Environment Agency	Regulatory roles on rivers and pollution. River Basin and Catchment Management.
Historic England	Regulatory role for protected heritage features.
Town & Parish Councils	Use the Management Plan to inform Parish level plans and when considering planning applications. Implement local nature recovery actions. Celebrate being part of the National Landscape and help to raise awareness.
Conservation organisations	Recognise the special qualities of the National Landscape, and adapt activities to fit with the Plan.
Farmers, landowner and land management organisations	Use the Management Plan to guide land management, and development proposals, to align with the Plan's aims and deliver public benefits.
Tourism organisations and businesses	Support a sustainable or regenerative tourism ethic. Encourage contribution to conservation.
Developers, and infrastructure providers (including utilities) –	Use the Management Plan to guide development proposals, and to avoid adverse impacts, mitigate and where necessary compensate.

The local authorities have a very important role, across many topics:

Council department (generic description)	Role regarding the Shropshire Hills National Landscape
Planning	Protect the National Landscape against inappropriate development, encourage sustainable and compatible forms of development.
Outdoor Recreation	Manage and promote appropriate public access, and manage council countryside sites.
Policy & Environment	Specialist support e.g. on biodiversity, data, policy, management of trees and historic buildings.
Public Health & Biodiversity	Local Nature Recovery Strategy, nature and landscape protection through input to planning. Enforce Environmental Health and pollution standards, maintain standards in food and animal health.
Culture Leisure & Tourism	Raise awareness of and interpret the Shropshire Hills through Museums and cultural venues, websites and events. Support relevant training and skills.
Transport planning and public transport	Plan for sustainable transport, provide public transport, support active travel including walking and cycling.
Economic Development	Promote sustainable forms of development, including in tourism, farming and environmental technology.
Climate Change	Support climate mitigation and adaptation action within the Council and in the wider community of the county.
Communication	Support appropriate promotion of the National Landscape and raising awareness of special qualities.
Highways	Support sustainable transport policy, manage roads to sympathetic designs and standards.
Waste	Encourage sustainable behaviour and resource use, avoidance of flytipping.
Education	Encourage understanding, participation and enjoyment of the countryside.
Social care	Encourage wider participation and enjoyment of the countryside.
Legal & Democratic services	Support for legal requirements of the designation, administer aspects of Common Land.

Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team

The National Landscapes Association describes the roles of National Landscape Teams as to **Convene, Enable and Deliver**.

The Team is made up of currently 13 people, made up of core and project staff. Current key activities of the team include:

- Farming in Protected Landscapes programme
- Convening and supporting partnerships
- Ancient Woodlands restoration project
- Delivery of Defra capital funding
- Sustainable tourism delivery including Shuttles
- Clun headwaters
- Young Rangers and outreach work
- Strategic work and input to consultations
- Support to Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust
- Communications and engagement
- Collaboration locally and in wider networks

The Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust is a charity dedicated to promoting the conservation and enhancement of the of the Shropshire Hills and integral to the composite structures of the National Landscape. The majority of the Trust's work is achieved through the Conservation Fund, supported by the National Landscape Team. This is a small grant pot to support practical projects by community groups that help the Shropshire Hills to be a beautiful landscape where nature and people thrive together.

Priority areas for projects are:

- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills.
- Educational and awareness-raising activities relating to the area and its conservation, especially involving young people.

Funding

Government funding

In scale, agri-environment is the largest area of government funding in support of the National Landscape, though it is not directly linked to National Landscape structures. The transition to the ELM schemes has been difficult, and at the time of writing, farmer confidence is not high.

National Landscapes funding – Defra funding has in recent years been variable, with an uplift in core revenue funding in 2024-25 and then a reduction for 2025-26 back to the level of 2022-23, which with inflation is a significant real terms cut. Capital funding has been provided by Defra in recent years, which has enabled some good projects through partners. However the National Landscape team holds no assets to invest capital funding in directly. The late announcement of government funding, short periods of funding agreements, and short notice new programmes make forward planning very difficult and this is a key reason why a detailed implementation plan is not included in this Plan.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has been extended twice, into a fifth year (2025-26). This is very welcome, but the future of the programme is uncertain at the time of writing.

Defra have undertaken to develop a new formula for Protected Landscapes, and to improve overall funding for National Landscapes.

Major project funders

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), is a significant fund, especially the large scale new 'Landscape Connections' programme offering projects with 8 years of delivery.

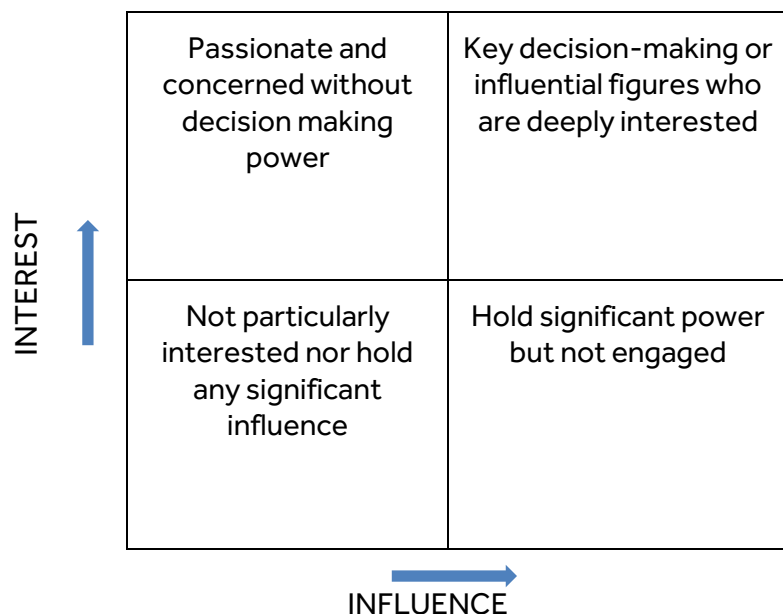
Green Finance

The National Landscape team have explored with the National Landscapes Association team potential theme areas for green finance relevant to the Shropshire Hills, including Peat, Wood & Trees, Water and Agriculture. This is an active area for further exploration. Green Finance may be used directly by landowners without involvement of the National Landscape team.

Partnership working

Partnership working includes the structures, processes and culture which support delivery. To support implementation of the Plan, the National Landscape structures and ways of partnership working are being modernised. This has been informed by good practice elsewhere, and by the stakeholder matrix below, to enable better engagement with high influence stakeholders, and at the same time to enable more people with high interest to get involved.

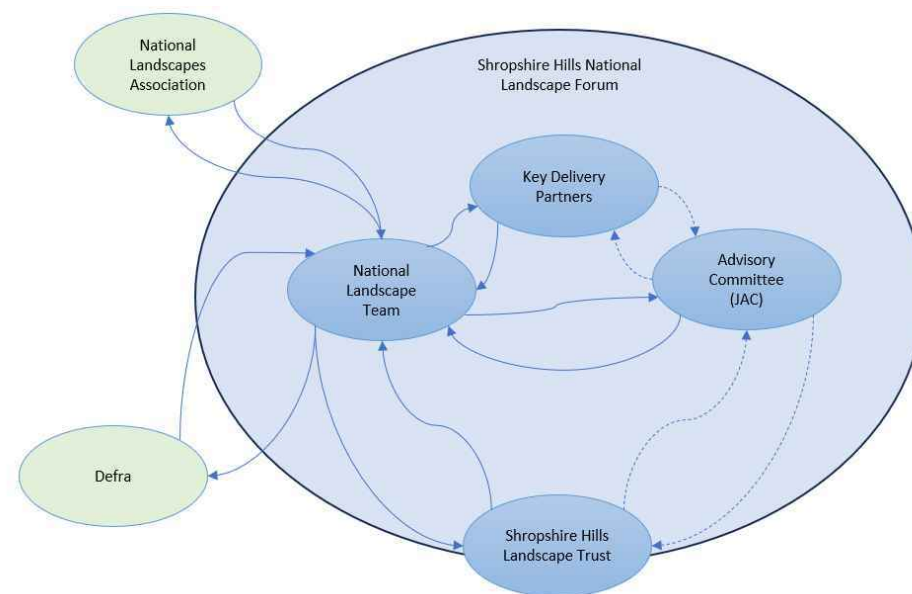
Matrix of stakeholders



The changes being taken forward with the Plan include:

- More regular but flexible liaison with **Key Delivery Partners** (especially relevant authorities), supported by occasional Topic Groups.
- Creating a **broader and more informal Forum**, with meetings twice a year, to broaden engagement and explore topics. This style of group will be more inclusive and participative than the previous Partnership.
- Re-forming a smaller **Advisory Committee** to have advisory oversight of the team's work and advise the Councils where needed in relation to the National Landscape.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape has a composite structure, with no legal entity organisation. The new structure can be represented as:



Effective partnership processes include understanding the nested systems of organisations and people, and their key nodes and flows. From this can be judged where to have the best input. Partnerships with other organisations may need to be formalised in appropriate ways. Reporting of partner activity supporting the Plan will be encouraged.

The culture of partnership working comes from things such as:

- Listening and respecting other viewpoints
- Taking the time to develop relationships
- Being sensitive to cultural differences and power dynamics
- Understanding the motivators and drivers for other partners
- Considering whose voices aren't being heard
- Good communication, honesty and assertiveness
- Being willing to adapt our own activities
- Working for mutual benefit
- Collaborating not competing

Appropriate values will be encouraged in partnership work.

Potential project areas

Ideas for potential new projects arising from the Recommendations and Aspirations are identified here (which could be led by any variety of organisation and in partnership with any combination of partners).

Good projects will often address a number of the plan themes at once e.g. nature, climate and people, rather than just nature. Note that not all actions are 'projects' – ongoing routine activities are still very important and the Policies can guide how many of these can best be done.

The following list is exploratory and not exhaustive.

Potential project	Main themes addressed					
	Nature	Climate	Water	Land	People	Place
Shropshire Hills Landscape Connections (project under NLHF funding stream, in early stages of development)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Significant project for the Teme Headwaters focusing on re-naturalising hydrology	x	x	x	x	x	
Landscape Recovery project(s)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Development of farmer clusters and a local network for these	x	x	x	x	x	x
Restoration of deep peat areas	x	x	x			
Targeted projects to bring priority nature sites into good condition	x	x	x	x		
Targeted habitat creation, enhancing the nature recovery network and contributing to 30x30 targets	x	x	x	x		

Potential project	Main themes addressed					
	Nature	Climate	Water	Land	People	Place
Agroforestry, wood pasture and trees outside woods	x	x	x	x	x	x
Structured and enhanced support for parish level nature recovery activity	x				x	x
Control of invasive non-native species	x		x	x		
Exploration of Green Finance and trial projects	x	x	x	x		
Further controlled release of beavers in selected carefully managed sites	x		x			
Ongoing targeted work on curlew conservation	x					
Expansion of farm carbon audits		x		x	x	
Community-led renewable energy project		x			x	x
Further production and use of biochar	x	x	x	x		
Expansion of natural flood management	x	x	x	x		
Further work on soil carbon, sequestration and storage, expanding knowledge and disseminating	x	x	x	x		
Soil protection, erosion risk mapping	x	x	x	x		
Further work on highways including sustainable drainage and road verges	x		x	x		x
Expansion of demonstration farms	x	x	x	x	x	
Co-ordinated deer management to benefit woodlands	x	x		x		

Potential project	Main themes addressed					
	Nature	Climate	Water	Land	People	Place
Support for citizen science, such as monitoring and recording	x		x		x	x
Volunteer maintenance and monitoring of historic monuments				x	x	x
Targeted projects to bring priority heritage sites into good condition					x	x
A competition or awards scheme to support National Landscape priorities e.g. good quality development, land management, tourism businesses	x	x	x	x	x	X
New multi-user access routes					x	X
Arts projects for engagement	x	x			x	X
More youth activities	x	x			x	x
Awareness raising on low carbon activities and lifestyles		x			x	
Promote and maintain a network of the best geological sites				x	x	x
Scheme to encourage visitors and tourism businesses to donate towards conservation projects	x				x	x
Support to tourism businesses to develop regenerative approaches	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dark Skies project raising awareness of light pollution					x	x

Potential project	Main themes addressed					
	Nature	Climate	Water	Land	People	Place
Expanded delivery of Climate Fresk and carbon literacy training and support to local climate groups		x			x	
Developing and publicising recreation opportunities using public transport					x	x
Events for the public celebrating nature, heritage and cultural heritage	x			x	x	x
Structured interpretation improvements at key visitor sites	x	x	x	x	x	x
Integrated conservation, heritage and visitor management in the Wrekin area.	x	x	x	x	x	x
Local food – promotion and linking producers with outlets				x	x	
Projects trialling alternative economic models	x	x	x	x	x	x
More delivery of access for all physical improvements					x	x
Social prescribing for outdoor activities					x	x
Targeted new engagement and opportunities for outdoor and nature experiences for under-represented groups, both residents and visitors.					x	x
Developing and promoting new opportunities for active travel and recreational walking and cycling					x	x
Revitalising green and built public spaces in villages and towns	x	x		x	x	x

Monitoring

This section relates to monitoring of **condition** of the Shropshire Hills – the state of the National Landscape and trends in this, through data and indicators. This relates to the **outcomes** of activity, but at a landscape level, data often only show net trends, which can include pressures pushing the wrong way, e.g. hedgerows planted and others lost.

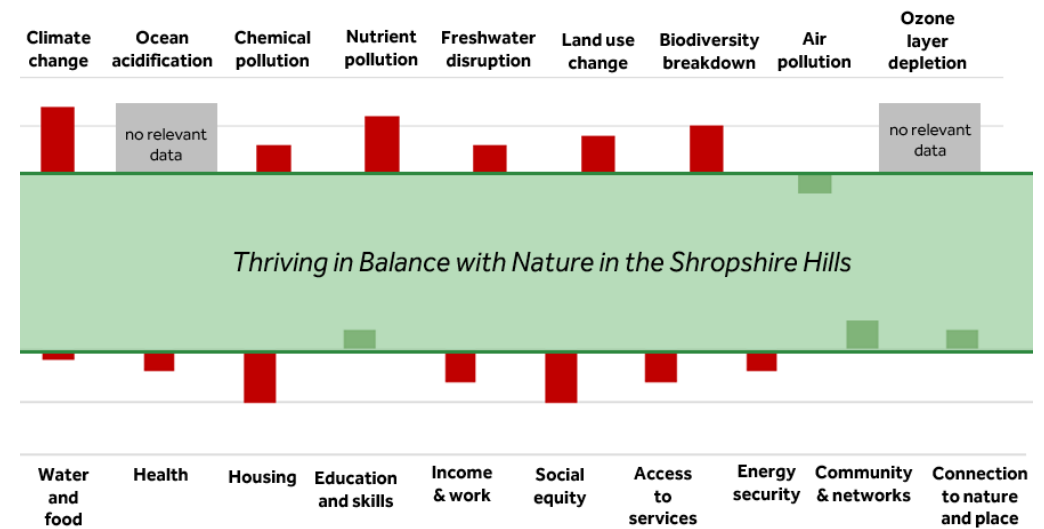
This will be principally led by the **Targets and Outcomes Framework**, which focuses on environmental targets. While online data, mapping tools etc continue to improve, the capacity of public sector bodies to work with data and monitoring has decreased, and this includes the National Landscape team. Water is notably absent from the Framework, and the **% of watercourses in good ecological status** is a useful indicator also to follow, for which data is available. A suite of 55 headline indicators are included in the beginning of the State of the Shropshire Hills report.

There is a tension between what is measurable (and for which data exists) and what is important. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy set out measures or indicators of sustainability, focusing on what matters rather than being driven by data availability:

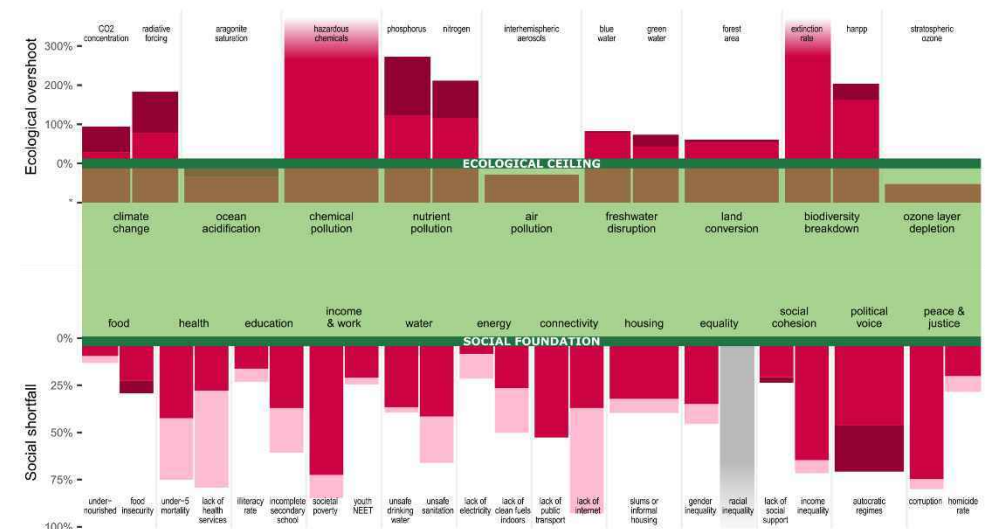
- Carbon emissions from travel to and within the area.
- Carbon emissions from tourism businesses e.g. energy use, footprint of food, drink and products.
- Negative environmental impacts from tourism e.g. path erosion, wildlife disturbance, loss of tranquillity, harm to water environment.
- Financial support for conservation and nature recovery through tourism and visitors.
- Proportion of sustainable and local food and drink used by visitors.
- Degree of social inclusion of tourism and among visitors.
- Social benefits, and avoidance of harm, to local communities from tourism.
- Improved health, wellbeing, learning and connectedness to nature among visitors.
- Degree to which visitors show or develop pro-environmental behaviours.
- Adaptation to climate change (e.g. repairs plus improvements to infrastructure).
- Inclusive governance and partnership.

This approach requires us then to see what we, with partners, can discern or discover about these factors.

The version of the Doughnut unrolled methodology used in this Plan is similar, focusing on what is important, using data where available and complementing this with informed assessment. It is intended to develop the Doughnut unrolled dashboard below as a monitoring tool for the Plan:



This is in line with the 2025 development of the global Doughnut unrolled, shown below, which shows **trends** through the shading of the colour bars (pink shows an improvement and crimson shows a deterioration):



Appendices

1. The Landscapes Review (the Glover Review)

The government commissioned in 2018 an independent review into whether the protections for National Parks and AONBs were still fit for purpose, and what might be done better. The Review Panel was chaired by Julian Glover, who visited the Shropshire Hills in January 2019 as part of the Panel's evidence gathering. The Landscapes Review final report was published in September 2019, and its effects have been working through during the last Plan period. Among the review's 27 recommendations were strengthening AONBs, with updated legal purposes, more powers and doubled core funding.

The government ran a consultation from January 2022 in response to the Landscapes Review, with promising interest in a range of improvements. On 29th November 2023 the government published the outcome of the consultation, with disappointing news of those of the Review's recommendations which were not being enacted. This stage effectively brought to a close the 'once in a generation' process of the Landscapes Review, and uptake by government of the review's recommendations had been partial. A step change was possibly achieved for National Landscapes, but not such a big step as had been hoped for. Subsequent developments including the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme have helped raise further the funding, role and profile of National Landscape teams.

There are some areas which were highlighted in the Review which Defra has indicated it is still interested in progressing, including:

- Work on a new funding formula for protected landscapes (National Landscapes and National Parks)
- Update and potential expansion of legal purposes of designation
- Potential for statutory consultee status in planning (though the legalities of this are not easy as most National Landscape bodies are not legal entities).

2. Rebranding as National Landscapes

Rebranding to National Landscapes, as part of a range of measures to update and strengthen the AONB designation, was proposed in the Glover Review report of 2019. This recognised the longstanding problems with the awkward and inaccessible AONB acronym, and the very long full name. Rebranding was taken forward by Defra and the National Association for AONBs, including consultations with various stakeholders. New branding proposals were developed over a year or so, informed by work with AONB staff teams, partners, government, businesses, farmers and people from communities who are under-represented as visitors to the areas. As well as a brand strategy and communication guidelines, the work involved developing a new identity for the NAAONB as the 'National Landscapes Association', and for the family of National Landscapes, both collectively and individually. New logos for each National Landscape were designed as part of a coherent set, taking inspiration and cues from photographs and information supplied by the teams on the special characteristics of each area.

The rebranding was launched successfully in November 2023. It is much more than a cosmetic change of logos, but marks a new era for these areas as National Landscapes, with a greater focus on nature recovery, on appealing to wider audiences and being a stronger, more coherent national network.

The wording in the legislation remains 'area of outstanding natural beauty' and there may be some occasions where use of these words in addition is a useful clarifier. However, government have fully embraced the National Landscape name in both Defra publications and in planning policy such as the National Planning Policy Framework. Since one aim of rebranding was to get rid of an acronym which was a barrier to understanding, the use of new acronyms such as NL or SHNL is not encouraged.

3. Legal framework for National Landscapes, including strengthened legal duty on public bodies

The **primary purpose** of the designation is '**to conserve and enhance natural beauty**'. The **1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act** first established the 'area of outstanding natural beauty' designation and this statutory purpose. The Act provided these areas with protection under planning law against inappropriate development and gave **local authorities general powers to take action in support of the purpose** (which remain in place). Government have published [guidance](#) on the designation and management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of a National Landscape is to do with the relationship between people and place. It encompasses everything - 'natural' and human - that makes an area distinctive. It includes the area's geology and landform, its climate and soils, its wildlife and ecology. It includes the rich history of human settlement and land use over the centuries, its archaeology and buildings, its cultural associations, and the people who live in it, past and present.

The Landscapes Review recommended updating and extending the purposes of designation to encompass aspects such as nature recovery, cultural heritage and social inclusion. This was not taken up in the government's response to the Review, but in December 2024 the new government committed to bringing forward primary legislation to update the purposes of designation of protected landscapes. The broad view taken by this Plan therefore represents the direction of travel.

Countryside Commission guidance of 1991 defined **secondary purposes** for areas of outstanding natural beauty. These do not carry the same weight but have not been removed or updated so they are still relevant:

- *In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.*
- *Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves, conserve and enhance the environment.*
- *Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.*

The **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** (CRoW Act) was a significant step forward and added additional legal responsibilities:

- **a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare a Management Plan** 'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and to review the Plan every five years. Where a National Landscape involves more than one local authority they are required 'act jointly'.
- **a statutory duty in Section 85 on all 'relevant authorities'** to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of areas of outstanding natural beauty when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas. The CRoW Act defines relevant authorities as:
 - Government Ministers,
 - Public bodies, include local authorities, Parish and Town councils, amongst others.
 - Statutory undertakers include rail and utilities companies (water and sewerage, electricity, gas, telecommunications).
 - Any persons holding a public office - including Elected Members.

The **Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023** (LURA) strengthened for English National Landscapes the S85 statutory duty from 'have regard' to the purpose, to 'seek to further' the purpose:

85.— General duty of public bodies etc.

*(A1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority **must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty** of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*

(1A) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision about how a relevant authority is to comply with the duty under subsection (A1) (including provision about things that the authority may, must or must not do to comply with the duty).

This is a very significant change. Government guidance has been published on the new duty in December 2024 and further regulations through statutory instrument are expected on this. The guidance is considered to be weaker than similar provisions in legislation on duties for public bodies e.g. on equality. In particular, the consideration of what is 'reasonable and proportionate' is down to the relevant authority itself to determine, which undermines accountability and strength of the duty. Additional guidance for relevant authorities on the new duty has been published by the National Landscapes Association.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 also enables the Secretary of State by regulations to make provision:

- Requiring a National Landscape **Management Plan to contribute to the meeting of Environment Acts targets** and setting out how (Section 90 (2A))
- Requiring a **relevant authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of the Management Plan** and setting out how (Section 90A).

These regulations have not yet been prepared. The requirement for relevant authorities to contribute to the implementation of a National Landscape Management Plan is new, and could be a significant positive change. Previously the statutory duty only extended to preparing and reviewing the Plan, which was an obvious loophole.

4. 30 by 30 and Environmental Improvement Plan targets

The government have committed to protecting 30% of the UK's land by 2030, which is target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The ultimate goal of this is to halt and reverse the steep decline of biodiversity worldwide, an outcome based on seeking a transformative change in the way humans manage our shared planet. The Global Biodiversity Framework is articulated as a step towards the objective of "people living in harmony with nature" by 2050. The Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 sets out the approach to delivering 30 by 30 on land in England by:

1. Strengthening: ensuring effective policy and statutory safeguards and powers are in place to improve management for nature, preventing degradation and ensuring appropriate access for people.
2. Extending and creating: designating new protected areas and restoring or creating wildlife rich habitat outside of these
3. Investing: investing in habitat restoration across our protected areas and beyond.

In October 2024 Defra published criteria that land needs to meet to contribute towards 30by30 in England. These focus on 3 themes:

Purpose - demonstrate that their purposes or management objectives will ensure the delivery of in-situ conservation outcomes.

Protection - demonstrate that in-situ conservation will be sustained over the long term (at least 20 years)

Management - be effectively managed and able to demonstrate overall progress towards in-situ conservation outcomes.

5. International context

National Landscapes are recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as 'Category V Protected Landscapes', defined as:

'A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.'

They are recognised therefore as cultural landscapes, in distinction to other categories of natural or near-natural areas. They have also come to be recognised as leaders in area-based sustainable development, pioneering integrated countryside management based on voluntary partnerships engaging and working with local communities to secure common goals.

The Shropshire Hills is a member of the EUROPARC Federation which provides a forum to share experience, collaborate and progress common aims among protected areas in 40 countries. The Shropshire Hills participates in a number of EUROPARC programmes including the Sustainable Tourism Charter and Young Rangers. The Shropshire Hills is also active in the EUROPARC Atlantic Isles section.



National Landscapes are within a grouping of Landscape, Regional and Nature Parks (as distinct from National Parks), of which there are around 900 across Europe, with slightly different models in different countries.

6. Shropshire Hills National Landscape structures – the Team, the Trust, advisory oversight and partnership

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team currently comprises 12 staff, employed by Shropshire Council to work for the purpose of the National Landscape and the aims of the Management Plan. The team are core funded by Defra with contributions from the two local authorities. As well as direct delivery, the team act as 'animators' – facilitating, advising, and supporting action by a wide range of partners.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership was, up to the end of 2025, the joint advisory committee structure established by Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council to prepare and oversee delivery of the management plan for the National Landscape.

With the formal approval of this Plan will go approval by the two Councils of a new smaller **Advisory Committee** which will scrutinise and advise on work of the Team. Along with a new broad and more informal **Forum** to engage wider stakeholders, and new working arrangements for collaboration with **Key Delivery Partners**, the new structure will strengthen governance and partnership working for the National Landscape.

The Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust is a charity formed in 2016, dedicated to promoting the conservation and enhancement of the of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. The Trust works in a collaborative and complementary way with the Team to raise money and distribute it, mainly through the Conservation Fund, a small grant pot to support practical projects by local groups.

7. National Landscapes Association

The National Landscapes Association is a charity which supports the UK's network of National Landscapes to help them to be as effective as possible. Its Vision is **"Beautiful landscapes where nature and people thrive together"**.

The Association has defined its purpose as to lead and champion activity, in partnership with National Landscapes, to protect and restore the UK's most outstanding landscapes and make sure everyone can enjoy them.

The summary page of the Association's current strategy is shown below.



8. The Plan review process

The Plan cycle was delayed by one year to bring it into the 2025-2030 cycle, at the suggestion of Defra in a ministerial letter of July 2022. A review statement was published in July 2023 confirming the one year delay, identifying new issues and clarifying that the previous Plan would remain valid until 2025 when this new one is in place.

The process followed as far as possible the draft Management Planning guidance from Natural England, though in some places this was felt to be over-complex. Government published Management Plan guidance in June 2025, when this Plan was already fully drafted and out for public consultation. A scoping stage involved gathering data, and information on community views through a public survey carried out during 2024. The Plan review was brought to every meeting of the Partnership through 2023 and 2024, which proved very useful for sense checking. The Sustainability Appraisal process has been carried out alongside as detailed below. A meeting of a new key partner delivery group was held in January 2024.

The main review stage involved looking at existing policies and plan content, creating a new vision and new topic sections. Two meetings of topic groups were held in July 2024 – for 'Landscape, Natural Beauty and Land Management' and for 'Planning'.



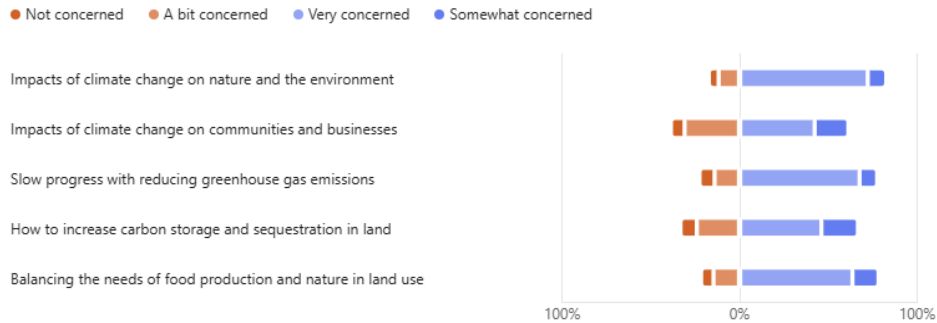
General inputs to Plan review process

During drafting a number of people have had input into sections and provided comments. An external contractor (Cragattak, who also completed the State of the Shropshire Hills report) undertook an independent critical review of the draft Plan. All of these inputs have been very useful.

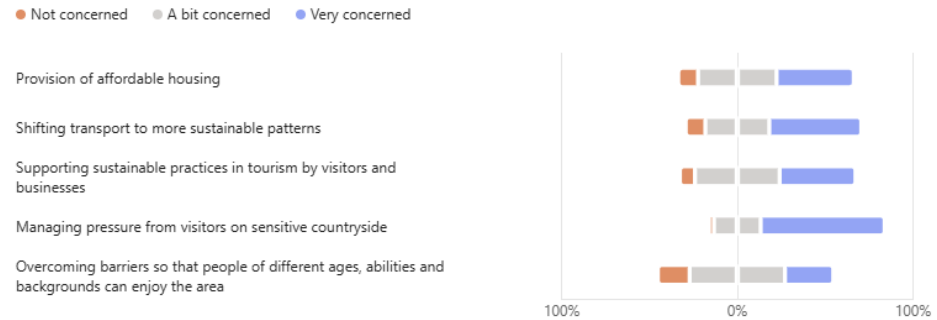
Answers to how concerned people are on various topics:



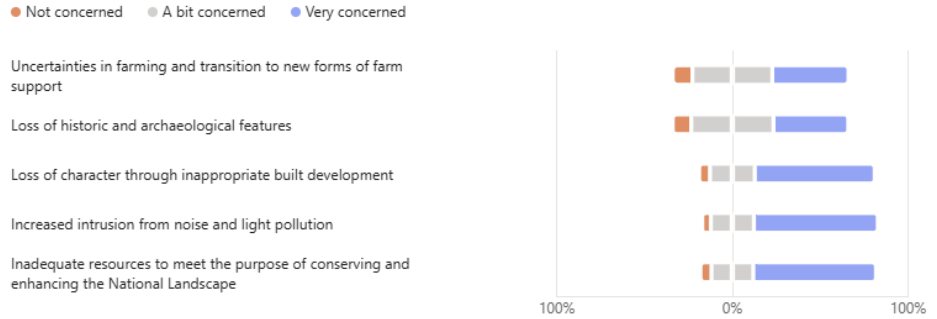
Climate



People



Place



Consultation

After a delay due to the local government elections, the public consultation period for the Plan ran from mid-May to mid-August 2025. Significant efforts were made to engage people with the Plan - a 2 minute audio introduction was produced and the Summer Forum event on 5th June acted as a launch of the draft Plan with 85 people in attendance. A 20 minute presentation on the Plan was given by members of the Team to around 10 groups reaching several hundred people. This included four online sessions with 'key delivery partners'. The presentation was also made available on YouTube. An online questionnaire was opened, along with a new web page communicating the Vision and main themes of the Plan. A workshop was held on Doughnut Economics and regenerative approaches on 24th July which was a useful addition to the consultation process. A face to face meeting was held with representatives of the NFU and Clee View Farmers Group. An informal consultation was held with the Young Rangers group.

In making changes to the draft Plan, the balance of all the comments received were considered. Some partner organisations were involved in further discussions on the matters raised.



9. Supporting documents and processes

Documents relating to the following mandatory processes supporting the Management Plan are available [here](#).

Sustainability appraisal

The process of Sustainability Appraisal of the Management Plan runs in parallel with the Plan review and meets the legal requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment, while also going further, to assess the Plan against economic and social aims. The process is based on Natural England's guidance and the practice of local authorities on sustainability appraisal for Local Plans.

The Scoping Report was published in December 2024 and includes a review of current policies and strategies affecting the Plan.

The Sustainability Appraisal report and non-technical summary were published in August 2025 to complement the draft Management Plan and some useful feedback was received from consultees.

The report identified ways in which areas of potential conflict identified might be resolved, including:

- The policies of the Management Plan are **generally strong for overall sustainability** as well as conserving and enhancing natural beauty, and there are many more positive interactions between issues than negative ones. The National Landscape and processes supporting it, including the Management Plan, are an important means to navigate some of the key issues for the area towards a sustainable future.
- It remains important to **demonstrate the positive economic effects of the environment and of looking after it**.
- A robust system is required to **ensure that affordable housing can be provided to meet social needs**, but in keeping with the high quality landscape.

- We need to be **willing to embrace landscape change which is positive ecologically**.
- There is rightly an increased urgency to tackling climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero . There is a **need to plan for ‘just transition’** where sections of society could be disproportionately affected by changes.
- The relative lack of detailed guidance for **renewable energy** means that decisions will probably continue to turn on case by case merits. All means of reducing carbon emissions need to be actively promoted, including energy conservation, carbon management in soils, biomass and small scale renewables.
- **Both climate change mitigation and adaptation are needed.** Despite overwhelming scientific evidence there is still work to do to convince some people that the current unprecedented changes to climate are human-induced and that action on emissions by the UK is worthwhile since every country must act if there is to be a global solution.
- To avoid any potential tension between nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and nature recovery, the **climate and ecological crises need to be addressed together by integrated measures**.
- As a rural area, many people are very **dependent on transport by private car and some people are very constrained in travel opportunities and choices by cost**. Influencing patterns of behaviour on private car use will be a long-term process and will require significant investment and commitment to alternatives. There is evidence of the economic and social value of reducing transport, and the level of homeworking is increasing.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

The Habitats Regulations require assessment of the Plan’s proposals against any Natura 2000 sites. The only site protected under the Habitats Regulations within the National Landscape is the Stiperstones and the Hollies SAC. Just outside the National Landscape boundary, and clearly affected by activities within it, is the River Clun SAC. Slightly further outside the boundary is Downton Gorge SAC. The HRA Scoping report assesses the Plan against these three sites.

The assessment concluded that the proposal can be screened out from further stages of assessment because significant effects are unlikely to occur, either alone or in combination with other ‘plans’. On the basis of the information provided, Natural England concurred with this view.



**Shropshire
Hills**
National
Landscape

Prepared and published,
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